Jun 6th, 9:00 AM - Jun 9th, 5:00 PM

Solitarist Thinking and Fragmentary Logic

Jim Gough  
*Red Deer College*

Mano Daniel  
*Douglas College*

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive

Part of the Philosophy Commons

https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive/OSSA7/papersandcommentaries/55

This Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Philosophy at Scholarship at UWindsor. It has been accepted for inclusion in OSSA Conference Archive by an authorized conference organizer of Scholarship at UWindsor. For more information, please contact scholarship@uwindsor.ca.
ABSTRACT: Amartya Sen and others argue that a distorted form of multiculturalism called plural monoculturalism fosters a potentially dangerous kind of multiculturalism based on solitarist thinking supported by fragmentary logic. We explicate the roles played by solitarist thinking, fragmentary logic and negative identity in defective forms of multiculturalism and argue that genuine multiculturalism is best understood using what we call particularist logic, pragmatically operating in context, to form the basis for a diversity of individual identities.

KEY WORDS: multiculturalism, solitarist thinking, fragmentary logic, particularist logic, individual autonomy, negative identity, reciprocity, individual identity, Principle of Charity, and Principle of Communal Resolution.

1(a) INTRODUCTION

Ideally multiculturalism should foster diversity within the unity of a cohesive community. Instead there is often a tension between various components in the multicultural mix. Recently some critics of contemporary multiculturalism have suggested that the ideal has degenerated into plural monoculturalism. This degeneration has occurred in part, we maintain, because of solitarist thinking, and the use of fragmentary logic to support this thinking.

It is important to draw a distinction between the descriptive term multicultural society—which denotes a society that has, as a matter of fact, a plurality of distinct cultures within it—and multiculturalism, which is a normative strategy to deal with a multicultural society. While it may be thought that the problems with multiculturalism are specific to liberal democracies and that alternative political structures may be better able to manage the necessary unity in a state of multiple cultures, we suggest that this political point is unhelpful. In dictatorial plural monoculturalist states it has been demonstrated that “with the passage of time, so-called ‘secular dictatorships’ emerge as nurseries of religious fanaticism” because “they reinforce traditional allegiances” and “the last solidarities to survive are the most visceral ones” (Sen 2006, p. 147). The issues with multiculturalism are not easily solved or resolved by moving from one liberal state to a
more repressive one which controls dissent. The dissent only gets submerged under the repressive state. It does not disappear since the dissent is the symptom not the cause of the problem of dysfunctional multicultural societies. So, we propose to consider the fundamental problems with making multiculturalism work as they are internal to the state and individuals within it. Our purpose is not explicitly political even though a consequence of what we argue may have some political significance.

In this paper we identify a tension between community and individual identity in plural monoculturalism. We explain how solitarist thinking contributes to a balkanization of multiple cultured societies by distorting the nature of individual identity. Fragmentary logic provides the structure to solitarist thinking and we critically evaluate it to determine its illicit connection to solitarist thinking. Finally, we suggest particularist logic as a structured way of thinking about a new version of multiculturalism called genuine multiculturalism.

1(b) THE TENSION BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY IN PLURAL MONOCULTURALISM

Within liberal democratic versions of multiculturalism, there is a tension between community and individual autonomy. This tension can be explicated in terms of its implications for individual identity. There is no doubt that being a member of a particular community influences the kind of identity that we can have. The typical individual belongs to at least two different kinds of community. One, he or she is a member of the moral community; as someone who possesses dignity and moral worth and who is the bearer of a cluster of human rights. In this sense, she shares the characteristics of a universal person. Additionally, one is invariably born (or raised) or associated with particular communities that are characterized by race, linguistic adherence, religion, etc. These are “partial” communal identities in that they provide a particularist twist to the universal ideal; one is a Canadian Muslim of Lebanese extraction, for example. Yet who I am is more than simply a set of collective identities. There must also be an acknowledgement of my specificity. As Charles Taylor puts it in *The Politics of Recognition*, “There is a certain way of being human that is *my* way of being. I am called upon to live my life in certain way, and not in imitation of anyone else’s life.” If I am not true to myself, “I miss the point of my life; I miss what being human is for *me*” (Taylor 1994, p. 30).

The tension occurs in a couple of ways. First, my partial identity is not something I discover or am given by the circumstances in which I find myself. Context is not the determinate of my identity. Rather, context supplies the ingredients for me to choose the content of my individual identity consistent with my identification in the moral community as an autonomous person. I choose who I will be within the set of possibilities presented to me. There is thus a tension between the extent to which context chooses for me and in which I negotiate my own self-determined identity. Second, it is possible for my partial identity to change over time, developmental stage and circumstance. There is no solitary and unified identity over time which uniquely constitutes “me” in a distinctive, essential way. The tension is to determine at any one point in time my unique existence within a supportive community (without retreat to some essentialist notion of “self”, “I”, or metaphysically mysterious “ego”). Third, my
identity is not the result of some universal or essential conception of a human. Rather it is my identity to choose and fashion to some degree.

2. SOLITARIST THINKING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MULTICULTURALISM

Amartya Sen argues that a distorted form of multiculturalism—plural monoculturalism—fosters a dangerous one-dimensional solitarist conception of identity. The solitarist conception of identity is dangerous because “many of the conflicts and barbarities in the world are sustained through the illusion of a unique and choice less identity” (2006, p. xv); a conception that has fostered the inaccurate and dangerous “clash of civilizations” explanation of the tension between cultures. This is inaccurate first because it supposes that individuals are only identified as individual members of a particular culture, sharing all and only the characteristics of that culture. Second, this classificatory identity has the effect of miniaturizing people by accentuating differences. These accentuated differences can be the basis for violence against any actual or perceived threat to their purity or security.

On this account, there is no open door, mid-point or appeasement between cultures. The clash of civilizations is seen as belligerent since “the imposition of an allegedly unique identity is often a crucial component of the ‘martial art’ of fomenting sectarian confrontation” (Sen 2006, p. xiii) and “[V]iolence is fomented by the imposition of singular and belligerent identities on gullible people, championed by proficient artisans of terror.” (2) Unique individual identity which provides an open set of diverse possibilities that should be favoured in a multicultural pluralism is replaced by a reduction to a single, unchanging essence of what it is to be a Moslem, Gentile or Jew. Yet, even these group identities are constantly going through a process of development, self-evaluation and re-invention. None of these groups remains static or unchanging. It is as if the main claim of multiculturalism, namely that individual diversity could flourish and grow within a flexible and adaptive unified community, is thought to be unattainable unless individuals are reduced to indistinguishable, universal cultural entities.

A viable multiculturalism is one in which individuals, through an autonomous process of self-creation are able to carve out a unique identity for themselves, while respecting the efforts of others to do the same. Individual autonomy cannot be developed in a vacuum. It needs the support and nurturing of family, in the private domain, and the support of society and culture in the public domain. The prisoner is not a self-chooser. He accepts the choices of others when to eat, what to wear, where to stay, when to sleep, and so on. His inability to develop in this environment as an autonomous individual is often the reason why prisoners fail to adapt to their new environment of choice when they are released after long periods of incarceration. This process of autonomous individuation is best envisaged as one pole of a process that has as its other pole identifying and codifying universal norms to protect the security of the community.

Consider a possible concrete example. Suppose we ponder the situation of a woman born in Malaysia during the 1970s. Now, Malaysia is comprised of three major ethnicities: Malay, Chinese and Indian. In 1969, it adopted a policy that made Malay the official culture and language of the nation with Islam the official religion. Malaysia privileged, through a form of affirmative action, the lot of the indigenous Malays, the Bumiputras. Bumiputras were given a fast track to a university education and offered
preferential treatment when forming businesses, tax breaks etc. in order to elevate the Malays into economic parity with the other two main ethnic groups. Now, consider someone in Malaysia born into a Christian Indian family (i.e., a minority community in Malaysia which in this case is predominantly Hindu). To whom and to what do her loyalties lie? In what ways do her Malaysian, Christian, Female, Indian identities comprise her? We have not exhausted her classifications or affiliations by any means; she could also belong to a professional organization like the Bar Association and be a committed Animal Rights activist. Her identity is hers to choose within the open set of possibilities presented to her. As such it is not pre-determinately fixed but rather always individually partial.

The issue at hand is the tension between interaction and isolation. Plural monoculturalism occurs when two or more styles, cultures, or traditions co-exist but there is little or no interaction between them; there is a sense of sequestering. Affirming that one belongs to a particular community and deciding to stay within its parameters is an act of freedom, but so is the decision to move beyond its parameters. Solitarist thinking encourages us to focus on only the first of these options. Plural monoculturalism assumes that a person’s relation to the wider civil community is mediated through the culture of one’s family. Hence, Sen sees the current Labour policy in Britain as misguided because it sees “citizens of immigrant communities and specific religious ethnicities first, and only through that membership see themselves as British, in a supposed federation of communities. It is not hard to understand that this uniquely fractional view of any nation would make it more open to the preaching and cultivation of sectarian violence.” (2006, p. 164) This is consistent with Sen’s criticism of religious or faith schools because they encourage a fragmentary perception of the demands of living in a desegregated society. For Sen, education is not simply to immerse children in an old, inherited ethos, but to develop the ability to reason, make appropriate choices and to live examined lives.

Stanley Fish’s (1997) critical discussion of what he calls “boutique multiculturalism” and “strong multiculturalism” is another example of someone trying to deal with the plural monoculturalism foisted by solitarist thinking ending up in a self-defeating position. Fish’s point, we take it, is that the appeal to tolerance to mediate between isolated communities is founded on failure because for a culture to retain its cultural integrity, it has to have some non-negotiable core values. This is clearly an essentialist position. It makes little sense to expect that core values are open to modification or negotiation, making those who adhere to them intolerant of change; i.e., it assumes that each culture has an identified or fixed specifiable core set of values which form its essence. For Fish strong multiculturalism will “want to accord a deep respect to all cultures at their core” such that “each has the right to form its own identity and nourish its own sense of what is rational and humane.” However, there is a problem that he notices, namely (Fish 1999, pp. 60-61):

the strong multiculturalist is best understood as holding some sort of essentialist position since tolerance is required to play the role of buffering cultures that are at root mutually exclusive of each other. For the strong multiculturalist, the first principle is not rationality or some other supracultural universal but tolerance. . . [However] . . . The trouble with stipulating tolerance as your first principle, however, is that you cannot possibly be faithful to it because sooner or later the culture whose core values you are tolerating will reveal itself to be intolerant at that same core. The distinctiveness that marks it as unique and self-defining will resist the appeal of moderation or incorporation into a larger whole.
On Fish’s (1999, p. 61) questionable account of the story, the strong multiculturalist holds a position which is ultimately self-defeating as he faces a destructive dilemma:

either he stretches his toleration so that it extends to the intolerance residing at the heart of a culture he would honor, in which case tolerance is no longer his guiding principle, or he condemns the core intolerance of that culture (recoiling in horror when Khomeini calls for the death of Rushdie), in which case he is no longer according it respect at the point where distinctiveness is most obviously at stake.

Fish (ibid.) concludes that strong multiculturalists “will grab the second handle of this dilemma . . . and thereby reveal himself not to be a strong multiculturalist at all”. Since Fish is, by his own admission, an avowed uniculturalist or monoculturalist, it is not surprising that he should discover in the fragmented nature of the structure or logic of multiculturalism some inherent defects. Fish has hooked himself by taking the solitarist bait and abandoning the possibility of genuine multiculturalism in order to avoid the problems with boutique and strong multiculturalism. He has thrown out the fish with the fish water. Fish believes that the failure of solitarist thinking supported by fragmentary logic is the failure of any version of multiculturalism, whereas we do not. He identifies some serious logical problems in the relationship between tolerance and multiculturalism’s ideals or goals but he has failed to understand the more fundamental problems of a way of thinking and the defective logic that supports it.

3. NEGATIVE IDENTITY AND SOLITARIST THINKING

Another way that solitarist thinking serves to potentially destroy the possibility of genuine multiculturalism is through the use of negative identity. Negative identity occurs when one cultural or religious identity is formed and individuated or authenticated on the basis of a rejection of another; the Arab Moslem cannot be an Arab Christian. The Christian has to be viewed as the enemy of the Moslem in order for the Moslem to believe in their unique identity—not someone or something else. The basis for personal identity as a function of one’s ethical identity is the same basis for intolerance. Without the intolerance there is thought to be no identity since identity involves some exclusivity. The identity of an individual in this sense is based on what multiculturalism is supposed to oppose or prevent, namely intolerance. The positive value of multicultural identities is conflicted by the apparent need for intolerance in order to wall in one’s individual identity. Fish seems to miss the idea of reciprocity to solve the structural problems he identifies with defective understandings of multiculturalism. Instead, he opts for the notion of singular-affiliation: the view that “in every situation, [there is] some one group that is naturally the preeminent collectivity for her, and she can have no choice in deciding on the relative importance of her different membership categories.” (1999, p.25)

Solitarist thinking often leads to balkanization and sectarian violence. It is reductionist in nature, turning “multidimensional human beings into one dimensional creatures.” (Sen 2006, p. 174)1 This way of thinking gives false justification to the

1 The Existentialists make this point well. Nietzsche, for example, calls the retreat from our unique existence “bad conscience”, an attempt to return to the mob mentality and its subsequent slave morality. "The illusion of singular identity . . . serves the violent purpose of those orchestrating such confrontations."
outcome. The generation of the illusion of unique (negative) identity appeals to those who are in the business of fomenting violence and the cultivated delusion of singularity. One of Sen’s major criticisms of plural monoculturalism is that it sees the protection and preservation of diverse communities as an end in itself, where the end is not the communities but the developing individual and subsequent cosmopolitan community. Instead Sen sees communities instrumentally. Communities are only important to the extent that they provide the context from which an individual derives or chooses her partial identities. Communities are what make social identities possible. As Appiah (2005, p. 107) puts it “we make up selves from a tool kit of options made available by our culture and society."

Each of us has to determine what constitute our relevant identities and to give a relative weight to these different identities since the importance of a particular (partial) identity will depend on the social context. Not all identities need to have durable importance; rather they can have a fleeting, contingent existence. It is this notion of identity that multicultural states need to support in order to remain consistent with genuine multiculturalism.

4. FRAGMENTARY LOGIC AND SOLITARIST-INDUCED VIOLENCE

Sen argues that conceptual confusion hampering an individual’s ability to think and creating solitarist-induced violence can occur as a result of the use of an illegitimate kind of reasoning he calls fragmentary logic such that:

The martial art of fostering violence draws on some basic instincts and uses them to crowd out the freedom to think and the possibility of composed reasoning. But it also draws [we have to recognize] on a kind of logic—a fragmentary logic. The specific identity that is separated out for special action is, in most cases, a genuine identity of the person to be recruited: a Hutu is indeed a Hutu, a “Tamil tiger” is clearly a Tamil, a Serb is not an Albanian, and a gentile German with a mind poisoned by Nazi philosophy is certainly a gentile German. What is done to turn that sense of self-understanding into a murderous instrument is (1) to ignore the relevance of all other affiliations and associations, and (2) to redefine the demands of the “sole” identity in a particularly belligerent form. (2006, pp. 175-176)

An inaccurate picture of the individual is fostered by the use of a questionable classification to arm a version of guilt by association. A defective offspring is created, supposing that the individual’s identity is captured by the classification of a group, in many cases a discredited group. All the other aspects of the individual’s identity are deliberately ignored to create the conceptual confusion of reference necessary to attempt to justify violence against this particular individual. As in the use of propaganda during wartime, the particular individual disappears and the faceless enemy takes his or her place; this enemy is easier to simplify into one univocal category of enemy threat. This forces individuals into singular boxes of identity, thereby deliberately negating the relevance of one’s plural social relations. This sets up the “all or none,” “us versus them” problem of black and white thinking common in situations of unwarranted aggression. Fragmentary logic is an integral part of the structure and reasoning of solitarist thinking.

Similarly, in Discourse on Thinking, Heidegger claims that a certain kind of calculative thinking produced the atom bomb and its threat to humanity and that without this thinking the threat would not exist.
helping to foster a false sense of the authority or acceptability of this defective thinking about individuals in a multicultural society. At the same time, it seems to identify a kind of singularity or uniqueness to individuals which is best identified under another logical structure, namely particularist logic.

It is possible, of course, for some cultural groups to remain apart from other cultures in a social context of mutual respect and accord, as Professor Hitchcock pointed out in his discussion of our paper during its presentation.² So, for example, the differences between the Mennonites and other groups in the same social state may be pronounced and significant. However, their separation is not one that necessarily sets up the conditions of the “us versus them” problem or any ensuing aggression because their identity is not built on negative identity and the solitarist thinking supported by fragmentary logic characteristic of more confrontational alternatives. There is an accommodation of so-called “old order,” “new order” “reform” and other forms of Mennonite cultural identities, all of which seem to co-exist. This suggests an accommodation to change and diversity of individual identity within the Mennonite community, a diversity not based on negative identity and the antagonism that can establish as the basis for solidarity.

Rejecting the impediment of solitarist thinking helps us to better deal conceptually with diversity within unity. One way of thinking of what Sen is up to is to see him trying to juggle two different balls at the same time: notions like “moral agent” and “human being” seem to presuppose a universalist conception of the individual, but such a conception cannot be the whole story since our individual lives (our biographies) are also the result of our partial (social) identities. The trick is to not see us as having only one partial identity but as a composite of a bunch of partial identities. That is, the Universalist conception of the individual (that which provides the unity of the self and is the bearer of universal human rights, etc.) must be coupled with a story that takes into account my partial identities.³ Accordingly any account of multiculturalism must be non-essentialist. Not only the emphasis but the perspective placed on the interpretation of the identity I create is up to me. It is my narrative. It functions to describe the world as I see it and the place that I see myself occupying in it. This allows for the dynamic of cosmopolitan communities which is the avowed goal of genuine multiculturalism.

² Hitchcock footnote
³ Charles Taylor (1994, pp. 38-39) delineates the problem well in his "The Politics of Recognition":

the development of the modern notion of identity, has given rise to a politics of difference. There is, of course, a Universalist basis to this . . . Everyone should be recognized for his or her unique identity. But recognition here means something else. With the politics of equal dignity, what is established is meant to be universally the same, an identical basket of rights and immunities; with the politics of difference, what we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctness from everyone else . . . The politics of difference is full of denunciations of discrimination and refusals of second-class citizenship. This gives the principle of universal equality a point of entry within the politics of dignity. But once inside, as it were, its demands are hard to assimilate to that politics. For it asks that we give acknowledgment and status to something that is not universally shared. Or, put otherwise, we give due acknowledgment only to what is universally present--everyone has an identity--through recognizing what is peculiar to each. The universal demand powers an acknowledgment of specificity.
5. A SOLUTION TO FRAGMENTARY AND SOLITARIST THINKING IN PARTICULARIST LOGIC

In order to understand particularist logic and how it differs from fragmentary logic in the determination of what we call genuine multiculturalism, it is useful to consider Gadamer’s notion of authentic conversation. According to Gadamer, participants can leave behind their self-preoccupations as they give themselves over to the to-and-fro of the discussion. What becomes central is the subject matter under discussion so that the locus of the activity is the “between” made concrete in the issue of the truth of the matter under discussion. Individual egos fall away and all the matter that matters dominates; Gadamer calls this “total mediation,” an unfolding event through which people and the matters at hand come to have their concrete identity. In this situation there is a merging of distinct horizons of the understanding in order to reach an agreement about the truth of something that matters so that “[T]o be in a conversation, however, means to be beyond oneself, to think with the other and to come back to oneself as if to another” (Michelfelder & Palmer 1989, p. 110).

Fragmentary logic, on the other hand, suggests that individuals are “unrelated” or “separated from some initially complete whole.” So, they are fragmented from something universal. However, as Sen uses the phrase it refers to a way of isolating one aspect of an individual’s identity and then using this separated identity to segregate her from other members of society. Just as it was irrelevant to isolate a woman’s biological identity from her social identity, so it is equally irrelevant and irresponsible to segregate and isolate any individual in a multicultural context. This kind of segregation is part of the solitarist’s thinking and as such a mistake. As we noted earlier, a particularly devastating form of this mistake can be the use of negative identity to foment aggression.

We argue that a form of logical reasoning we call particularist logic is the best to accommodate the non-solitarist version of genuine multiculturalism. The process of this logic is, first, dialogical and conversational. Its constituent components include self-individuating diversity (as this determines relationships of identity), non-theoretic practical consensus, and reciprocity. Second, practitioners should adhere to both a Principle of Charity and a Principle of Communal Resolution. The first principle obligates practitioners to accept a condition of openness and an attempt to reach a position based on fairness and respect for the views of others with whom one does not

---

4 The concept of a fusion of interpretive horizons approximates Donald Davidson’s principle of interpretive charity. Arguably, Gadamer’s position is superior. It demands continual recognition of the otherness of other perspectives, even as it denies the possibility of a point of view totally alien and hence unintelligible to us. Davidson’s argument is too strong; it minimises the very idea of conceptual schema and with it the possibility of acknowledging perspectives deeply unlike ours. Interpreting others with an eye to maximizing the truth of their beliefs and the rationality of their actions might well mean assimilating their world to ours in implausible and even damaging ways. Like particularist logic the focus is not on the argument in isolation from the arguers bringing about a change in belief or a resolution to a controversy but rather that there is an involvement of the argument and the arguers in a context in which their relations are intertwined in a dialogical process to achieve a result. (It is useful to contrast Davidson’s use of the Principle of Charity, the idea is that we should “count them with us” to Grady’s Principle of Humanity introduces the invocation to “count them intelligible.”) As a result of the application of these principles the player and the game are interconnected, arguer and argument are not separable or detached from each individual participant.
necessarily agree, while the second principle places an obligation to a principled process that involves the continuation of attempts to reach a resolution, even if such a resolution is not of equal value to all or is based on an incomplete or partial set of support for the conclusion. Third, particularist logic adherents “proceed in the face of conflict and disagreement on fundamental matters (Sunstein 2000, p. 98). As such, even if there is no obvious consensus, for example, on the issues of (i) the essential nature of human beings, so-called (ii) “hard cases” and/or (iii) first principles, it is possible to produce an argument. Negotiation can proceed to a resolution or conclusion without prior consensus or with silence on these issues or open questions. Finally, particularist logic is context-sensitive, operating at the level of “greatest particularity” and “it enlists silence, on certain basic questions, as a device for producing convergence despite disagreement, uncertainty, limits of time and capacity, and heterogeneity” (Sunstein 2000, pp. 98-99).

Like conductive reasoning, the premises of an argument employing particularist logic lead us to the conclusion by giving us some particular reasons—in this context, under these covering conditions—to accept the conclusion. Unlike inductive or deductive reasoning, there is no condition that the premises are inferentially or deductively related to the conclusion. So, for example, one person may accept the premise P1: Human beings have a natural ethical obligation to protect species in the natural world, while other people might accept the premise P2: Human beings have an inherent need to prevent ecological instability in the ecosystem of which they are a part, while still others might accept the premise P3: Human beings may find previously unknown species which could provide valuable medicines to cure current and future human diseases. The individuals who accept P1 use it to support the conclusion that C: It is important for human beings to protect endangered species in the natural environment. However, while other people accept P2 as support for C, they do not accept P1 as support for C. Still others accept P3 but not P1 or P2 as support for C. The reasons in support of the conclusion are separate from each other but what holds them all together converging on the same conclusion is the pragmatic adherence to the Principles of Charity and Communal Resolution, or the need to reach a practical resolution. There is no deep principle binding all the supporters of the conclusion. There need not be some fundamental theory about the essential nature of argument or human nature or psychology that holds among all members of the group to reach a resolution.

To suppose that any of these possibilities is necessary is to make a fundamental error, namely a category mistake; to suppose that in addition to the set of soldiers composing the regiment there is something else that identifies a separate spatio-temporal existence or metaphysical entity along with them, when in fact there is no such ghostly entity. The proponent of P1 need not necessarily have to understand any fundamental or deep theory behind the reasoning of the proponent of P2 or P3. Whether or not someone other than the arguer accepts the authority or assumptions behind these premises, such as authoritative appeals to “only someone from my culture could truly understand the significance of this attire or headwear” is separate from and may be irrelevant to “I don’t agree with the authority behind the wearing of this attire” but “I can (consistently) agree that your reason is a good piece of support for this conclusion” (the same conclusion which I support for a different reason).

It will be useful to consider two objections in order to clarify our thinking on particularist logic. First, particularity logic is not a case of what has been called full particularity, a “phenomenon (that) occurs when people agree on a result without
agreeing on any kind of supporting rationale” (Sunstein 2000, p. 99). Second, particularist logic is not a case of rationalization, where the conclusion is decided without any reasoning and the reasoning occurs after the fact of this decision. In particularist logic, an inability to agree on some particular reasons for supporting a conclusion is not a blanket inability to agree on any reasons. As well, in particularist logic, there is the recognition of reciprocity in reaching a consensus or agreeing on a supported conclusion. Put differently, although someone does not agree with P1 in support of C, there is a realization that it is important for this person to respect the integrity of the person who does support C with P1 because reciprocally the other person will be similarly implicated to accept the importance for someone else to have P2 serve as conductive support for the conclusion C.

In particularist logic, reasoning and negotiation operate together. Reasoning is not an independent means of securing agreement in negotiations but rather negotiation principles are inherent in the process. The form of this logic is a loose version of conductive arguing and the structure is based on a variation of what is called incompletely theorized agreements in a legal context (Sunstein 2000, pp. 99-100). Unlike proponents of the incompletely theorized agreements, it is not founded on any essentialist theory and does not claim that “in social life, people reason in ways that grow out of the particular role in which they find themselves. They know what actions are permissible, and what actions are off limits only because of their role.” (Sunstein 2000, p. 100) Instead, in particularist logic, the created identity of any individual arguer is polymorphous and contextually contingent, not fixed by some determinate role conditions. The expectations of an arguer cannot be aligned with the essential conditions defining a role of parent, student, doctor or whatever. The problem isn’t just about a lack of any determinate theory; it is also a problem of the lack of any determinate parameters for the arguer. We cannot rely on the essential characteristics of human nature, social role determinants or any deep metaphysical theory to provide the core of a possible agreement. Instead, particularist logic recognizes the importance of negotiation and reciprocity as important parts of the process of consensus reaching or conclusion acceptance. It is a dialogical process, a conversation.

In a multicultural society, a major contentious point of dispute or controversy may be C: There are good reasons to interfere with individual liberty of choice of dress or attire. In this case, we are not under any condition to define personal identity in exactly the same way for everyone in order to provide viable reasons in support of the conclusion. We are also not under any obligation to agree on particular cases of (a) clearly wrongful interference with individual liberty and (b) particular cases of agreed acceptable interference with individual liberty. Instead, we need to agree to negotiate to a conclusion on the basis of respect for individually diverse reasons or considerations and reciprocity among arguers. What counts as a piece of support for the conclusion is negotiated through a reciprocal relationship of respect for individual integrity. This means that in different contexts the negotiated support may differ for the same conclusion providing relevant but multifaceted support for the same general conclusion or agreement. The Principle of Charity and the Principle of Communal Resolution are implicit in any such argument. So, one individual might argue using P5: Respecting individual liberty requires only a clear and imminent threat to some identified individual in order to interfere with an individual’s choice of attire, while someone else might argue for the same conclusion using the premise P6: Our tradition clearly provides no support
for individual liberty in choice of dress or attire. While P5 is relevant support for C, independently of whether I accept it as support for C, P6 cannot be relevant support for C. These two principles, combined with a commitment to reciprocity and mutual respect for individuals, serve to induce agreement or concurrence without a formal or legal accord when it comes to what constitutes—in particular circumstances—relevantly similar parallels to gain acceptance for analogies. Hence, without any substantive theory, accepted definition or well-supported principle, it is still possible to agree that—for present purposes—sex discrimination is like race discrimination in all the ways necessary to achieve concurrence on the conclusion that follows this reasoning.

Particularist logic does not work like fragmentary logic to separate and categorize individuals from their self-chosen identities in order to foster acceptable violence. Instead it recognizes individual differences and conflicts or disagreements between individuals while attempting to forge social consensus among them in the acceptance of conclusions of conductive arguments.

6. CONCLUSION: PARTICULARIST LOGIC AND GENUINE MULTICULTURALISM

Traditional reasoning assumes intersubjective substitutions, universal existence conditions and affirmations of identity over time (the Identity of Indiscernibles, for example). These features of traditional logic make it amenable to use in solitarist thinking in multicultural societies. There is a universal affirmation of univocal identity required in traditional logic with ambiguity, equivocation and vagueness; demons that need to be exorcised from the discourse. A plurality of values is found in a diverse and disparate set of particular individuals. What can traditional logic say about them? How can traditional logic negotiate on the basis of irreducible differences to achieve consensus or concurrence on a single conclusion or resolution? An example of this kind of straightjacket can easily be found in the literature about multiculturalism with the invocation of logical entailment problems.

Particularist logic instead focuses on the affirmation of different and diverse reasons in favour of the same conclusion. It does not assert the necessity that the audience must share anything but a few minimalist points of affinity. There are no deep universal theories or principles behind its use; it is not reductionist. It cannot appeal to uniform repetition of results but the openness of the procedure helps to secure agreements in support of a controversial conclusion. So, individual identities can remain secure in their diversity. There is no need to compromise individuality to conformity with a universal or ideal, rigid designator.

In multiculturalism, there is an identification of informed and considered reciprocity as the basis for mutual respect and acknowledgement of individual differences. For example, the recent immigrant needs to identify what is important about the new culture she is entering or the new society she has chosen. She needs to understand what can be challenged and even rejected. Her relationship is negotiated reciprocity without the solitarist requirement that she shed significant aspects of her created identity. No culture, society or other human creation is static or immune to changing its invented traditions or procedures. So, the advice is (Sen 2006, p. 41)
the more you steep yourself in the culture of the host country the more you will be able to steep yourself in your own—the more an immigrant feels that his own culture is respected, the more open he will be to the host country” and she can legitimately ask “what minimum equipment is everyone supposed to possess and what may be legitimately challenged or rejected?

The open framework provided by non-solitarist thinking, structured by particularist logic, allows this kind of reciprocal relationship to occur. Individuality and identity is preserved while receptive to various new developments and options. Individuals are in positions of negotiation. What is possible for this individual is reciprocally possible for others as well. Instead of an “us/them” dichotomy requiring a kind of solitarist solution, there is an informed and coherent growth of both the individual and the society she inhabits. Instead of constriction and limitation, the social/cultural space is capacious and enlivened to new possibilities, while the integrity of individuals is protected.

In conclusion, some thoughts about the Rushdie case, the writer who in his writing offended a fundamentalist reading of a religious text, may prove illuminating (Sunstein 2000, p. 100). The case exemplifies the lack of the ingredients that go into genuine multiculturalism. Instead of openness to negotiation, there was a steadfast reinforcement of a literalist or monoculturalist approach. No negotiation was possible despite the offer made by the writer to attempt a negotiated resolution. Solidarity was taken to be threatened by the existence of the writings in the book. This conflict between the writer’s intentions and the antagonist’s unflinching negative interpretation is the hallmark of negative identity. Violence was threatened in order to preserve a solitary idea of uniform religious identity. Rushdie was nothing other than a failed Muslim. He wasn’t a fiction writer, British immigrant, etc., merely an apostate since all his other possible sources of identity were obliterated as having no relevance or significance. It seemed clear in the distorted, fragmentary logic of the antagonist that violence was the only redress to such a manifest insult. The only resolve to a failed believer is death which is a rather permanent way of eliminating the dissenting individual. A genuine multiculturalism must afford the possibility of avoiding this kind of solitarist thinking in the structure of the relationships of individuals within its domain.

Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* is, in many ways, a kind of mediation on the nature of the self. In the novel, for example, migration can be viewed as a metaphor for death and rebirth. The novel explores ways that the self, embedded in a set of cultural and linguistic practices reconstitutes itself into a new culture. This kind of interpretation, of course, is not in accord with solitarist thinking supported by fragmentary logic.

REFERENCES


