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## *Multicultural Post-Liberalism: A Question of Identity*

**Abstract:** A significant aspect of post-liberalism is the reality of multiculturalism, or the cultural and religious diversity in contemporary Western European societies. This has provoked new thinking on how this pluralism is to be managed, and how these minorities are to be integrated, accommodated and included. This is especially the case for those groups whose values are seen as in tension with certain liberal secular values. In Britain, multiculturalism has emerged as a theoretical and policy response to this post-liberal dilemma. This article outlines this response and how it overlaps with post-liberal concerns and principles. It focuses in particular on how religion fits into this picture, as an important strand in multiculturalist and post-liberal thought. It is argued that multiculturalism requires new thinking on religion as part of post-liberal politics, and that it already possesses resources conducive to this.

**Key words:** multiculturalism, post-liberalism, religious identity

**Abstrakt:** Realia wielokulturowości, czy różnicowania kulturowego i religijnego, we współczesnych społeczeństwach Europy Zachodniej są istotnym aspektem postliberalizmu. Fakt ten sprowokował nowy sposób myślenia o tym, jak ten pluralizm powinien być zarządzany oraz jak uwzględnić zintegrować i włączyć mniejszości, w szczególności te grupy, które są postrzegane jako sprzeczne z liberalnymi wartościami świeckimi, kontrastującymi z bardziej konserwatywnymi społecznie, nie-liberalnymi (a nawet ograniczającymi) wartościami niektórych mniejszości. W Wielkiej Brytanii wielokulturowość pojawiła się jako teoretyczny i polityczny odzew na ten postliberalny dylemat. Artykuł najpierw pokazuje ten odzew oraz przedstawia, w jaki sposób pokrywa się on z postliberalnymi problemami i zasadami, po czym skupia się na tym, jak religia wpisuje się w ten obraz, jako ważny nurt w myśli wielokulturowej i postliberalnej. Artykuł wykazuje, że wielokulturowość wymaga nowego myślenia o religii jako części polityki postliberalnej, oraz że posiada ona już potrzebne do tego zasoby.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wielokulturowość, postliberalizm, tożsamość religijna

## Introduction

Far from the end of history, the apparent triumph of liberalism after 1989 might be seen as more of a beginning than an end. At the same time as liberalism's triumph against communism was being proclaimed, in Western Europe it was beginning to face questions of adequacy from another source, emerging from the reality of multiculturalism. 1989 was the year of the first headscarf affair in France, which would eventually result in the banning of ostentatious religious symbols in public schools in the early 2000s and of full-face coverings in public spaces in 2011. 1989 was also the year of the Rushdie affair in Britain, when the issue of free speech and more specifically the freedom to satirise religion became a prominent public and political issue, and a variety of related controversies, and bans, have appeared in different European countries since. Just as liberalism seemed settled then, Western European populations were beginning to grapple with increasing claims from minority populations, particularly Muslims, as well as multicultural and multi-religious pluralism. Along with issues of racism and anti-racism that had gained increased attention in the preceding decades, Western European states were now confronted with questions about how to include and accommodate ethnic and religious diversity, which in turn would bring a variety of issues of free speech and public religion to the foreground of political and public debate. This would challenge certain core tenets of the liberal consensus, especially its ideas of neutrality and tolerance in the name of equality.

Beginning with the emergence of these multicultural challenges, and in relation primarily to Britain and a particular form of multiculturalist thinking that has emerged there, this paper aims to do the following: firstly, to explore the idea of multiculturalism as it has emerged in political theory as a response to these social and political issues, and secondly, to assess multiculturalism in particular relation to thinking about public religion. Multiculturalism itself is not explicitly posited as a form of post-liberalism by its leading thinkers, but there are two ways in which I hope to show its relevance in relation to post-liberal thinking. The interest for the first of these is multiculturalism's relevance as a form of thinking politically that although emerging from within a liberal democratic context does not orient around or justify its positions in relation to liberalism, and directly challenges certain liberal assumptions. The interest for the second is both that multiculturalism has been centrally concerned with religion in public and political life, and that this is a key point on which it contrasts itself with liberalism, and that post-liberal thought (certainly in relation to Britain) has a distinct and prominent theological strand. It is therefore pertinent to ask how these might relate.

Post-liberalism is perhaps best thought of as a family of positions connected but with distinct strands and emphases (and in this no different from liberalism or multiculturalism). John Gray [1993] took the 'post-' to be something like a new phase in liberalism, akin perhaps to what post-modern is to modern. Here, post-liberalism is engaged dialectically with liberalism, rejecting its stronger doctrinal claims, but liberal civil society institutions were held as the best, and universal, mode of managing divergent world-views, or incommensurable values. Gray came to revise his thinking, stating that, contrary to his earlier views on post-liberalism, "the institutional forms best suited to a *modus vivendi* may well not be the individualist institutions of liberal civil society but rather those of political and legal pluralism, in which the fundamental units are not individuals but communities", and came instead to focus on 'value-pluralism' in which liberalism can be but one form of political life among many and without any special claims to universality or the good [1996: 352]. In coming to question liberalism more profoundly, we might see Gray's departure from what he termed post-liberal as in fact closer to what some others have in mind when criticising liberalism from a post-liberal perspective.

The emphasis of much post-liberalism, certainly in the British context, has been to challenge the fundamental tenets of liberalism, including what Milbank and Pabst [2016] refer to as 'the two liberalisms', namely socio-cultural and political-economic liberalism. For the purposes of the discussion here, and with the focus on multiculturalism, I am more interested in the socio-cultural aspects, along with the political, although leave aside the economic. On these aspects, post-liberal thought moves away from the individual to the family and community, away from an abstracted, unencumbered self, to one embedded and deeply rooted, reinstating the social cultural into the political. Politically in Britain post-liberalism is manifested in the so-called Blue Labour and Red Tory movements, which leaning from (or perhaps into) different sides of the political centre line bring together a more conservative position on social values with a more socialist position on the economy. Goodhart [n.d.] sees it as a 'moving beyond' liberalism, where rather than atomised individuals people are seen as embedded in and dependent on relationships and the state of the wider communities of which they are a part. Sharing this general orientation, others have developed deconstructions of liberalism that seeks to present a new form of politics built on foundations beginning with embeddedness in the social sphere. Against 'atomistic self-centredness' of private freedom as individualism, Dallmayr [2019] calls for public freedom tied to equal respect across difference, for instance, and Milbank and Pabst, also point to

“inherent problems and deficiencies” of liberalism, of which its atomising tendencies are centrally important [2016: 2].

Notably, post-liberal thought, in Britain at least but not only, has a distinct and prominent theological strand in identifying problems of and proposed solutions to liberalism, and in which questions of the role of religion are central concerns and orientations. In Britain this has in particular been associated with the Radical Orthodoxy school, to which Milbank is strongly associated. This is of course not the case for all prominent post-liberals. Goodhart, cited above and who has been critical of multiculturalism [2013; 2019], would not come under this strand, but it is also notable that he cites work that does as consistent with his own non-theological conception. Importantly though is that this influence means that secularism, as part of liberal secular politics, is also a point of focus for interrogation. Bretherton, for example, states the need to “move beyond political liberalism to a post-liberal, postsecularist politics” [2010: 48]; Rowan Williams [2012], a former Archbishop of Canterbury, has distinguished between programmatic secularism, which is ideologically opposed to religion in politics and the public sphere, and procedural secularism, more accommodative of religion in public and political life. It is this issue of religion in the public sphere as part of a post-liberal settlement that this article is particularly concerned with in relation to multiculturalism.

It is important at this point to say something about the ‘post-’ in post-liberalism as signifying some important differences in what we take post-liberal to mean. ‘Moving beyond’ has already been evoked a couple of times above, but what does this mean? It might in fact be a part of looking sideways, to the reality of pluralism as we see it across different societies and different contexts (as seems to be at least partly the case for Gray’s revised position), or looking (to some extent) backwards, “seek[ing] to retrieve, revise and extend the classical legacy” [Milbank and Pabst 2016: 287]. For Bretherton, “the advocacy of a post-liberal, theological politics presumes a liberal constitutional order, the rule of law and a self-limiting state” and so is not about throwing the baby out with the bath water but more oriented towards (more or less radically) adjusting the temperature of the bath water. It is to recognise “not that liberalism is all bad, but that it has inherent problems and deficiencies” [Milbank and Pabst 2016: 2].

Here, then, in focussing on the context of Britain as a liberal secular state, I take post-liberalism in a way akin to the post-secular that Habermas observed. That is, not one where the prefix ‘post’ signifies something after, i.e. not a period after

liberalism, but where post- signifies the necessity of a more reflexive liberalism, that it is not the only game in town, that other ontological and epistemological claims are ineluctable parts of society, public and political discourse, that liberalism need not be the intellectual and cultural framework of appeal, and that just as others must reconcile with liberalism, so must liberalism reconcile and engage with those who challenge its form and content. That is to say that if we are to talk of post-liberal society, then it is one in which critiques and claims are not and cannot be restricted to a liberal framework or intellectual project, but must recognise the non-liberal to some extent as part of “a crowded and argumentative public square which acknowledges the authority of a legal mediator or broker whose job it is to balance and manage real difference” [Williams 2012: 27].

The first section below will develop an account of a form multiculturalism that emerges out of and responds to what we might call a post-liberal moment. The article will then go on to explore three central aspects of this multiculturalism with a particular focus on strands from political theology, in order to consider and question multiculturalism as an adequate response when it comes to religion specifically as part of this moment. Political theology for the purposes of this article is not to be understood in the Schmittian sense of politics as secularised theology, but draws on thinkers who bring a specifically theological orientation to political questions and issues, not least as there is a prominent strand in British post-liberal thought along these lines. While it will identify short-comings with certain concepts central to multiculturalism, and that multiculturalism has not made a clear enough statement on important questions relevant here, it will argue that multiculturalism offers the resources to do so, and point to how these might be developed.

### **Multiculturalism as post-liberal**

Before proceeding with the discussion of how we can see multiculturalism as a post-liberal form of response to problems and deficiencies of liberalism, it is important to specify what is being referred to by multiculturalism here. Multiculturalism is directly concerned with theoretical and state-policy matters of governing ethno-cultural diversity. In political theory it has developed against positions that emphasise individualist integrationist approaches (such as assimilationism) to place an emphasis also on the idea of group rights. Will Kymlicka’s liberal multiculturalism (1995), developed with the context of Canada firmly in mind is perhaps the most influential account. Another foundational text for multiculturalism is Charles Taylor’s well-known essay *The Politics of Recognition* (1994),

and this forms the basis of the specific form of multiculturalism that this article, focussed on the British context, explores. The exact form of multiculturalism I am interested in here, and what will be meant throughout this article when I use the term multiculturalism, is one which has developed in Britain and is in many ways a response to the British context. Indeed, it has recently been referred to as the Bristol School of Multiculturalism (BSM) [Levey 2019] in recognition of the institutional home of its foremost proponent (Tariq Modood, and institutional connection shared with others). This multiculturalism has developed in political theory and draws heavily from sociological insights. In contrast with Kymlicka's liberal multiculturalism, this form of British multiculturalism purposefully sets itself, its bases and foundational orientations, apart from liberalism. It has mostly been concerned with ethnic minorities, particularly Muslims, and, although emanating from anti-racism concerns, its principles have been applied to thinking about secularism and public religion [Modood 2019]. It is necessary to point out here that leading proponents of this school (notably Tariq Modood and Bhikhu Parekh) do not conceive multiculturalism as a post-liberal theory, and of course post-liberals are not necessarily multiculturalists (and might even oppose certain aspects of it). It is necessary, therefore, to outline ways in which this multiculturalism might be considered in these terms, and this can be done through outlining a few of its foundational tenets.

This section will outline multiculturalism's most important and foundational concepts and positions in relation to this question. The first point to note is that multiculturalism in its BSM form does not privilege liberalism. It is not a critical liberal account (as is Gray's for instance), and does not look to liberalism as its source of orientation or for its justifications. It does, nevertheless, presume a liberal constitutional order.

Multiculturalism rejects the notion of liberal 'neutrality' as a myth; liberalism, as Charles Taylor has pointed out, is its own 'fighting creed' [Taylor 1994: 62]. Stemming from this inevitability in a state or society promoting, whether self-consciously and self-aware or not, a particular cultural form, multiculturalism is particularly focussed on the impact this has on ethnic minorities and their full integration into the national community. Stemming from anti-racism concerns, this "begin[s] with the fact of negative difference" [2007: 37], that is, discrimination that needs to be addressed, but then importantly adds that positive identity making and assertiveness, held and led by minorities themselves, can challenge these inferiorised negative minority identities [Modood 2007: 41]. The focus here

then is on ethno-religious groups, patterns of discrimination, and minority claims making.

In this multiculturalism holds three important principles: liberal tolerance is not sufficient for full equality of citizens, which needs to be conceived in stronger and more positive terms of respect and fuller 'recognition'; that for this to be achieved individual rights need to be balanced with group rights; and thus, that difference is not a negative obstacle to be overcome but requires multicultural recognition. When it comes to religion more specifically, it sees religion as a public good to be accommodated and supported through state-religion institutional connections [Modood 2019]. Indeed, a number of interventions by its leading proponents have been in response to events where the relationship between public religion and liberal secularism (especially in more 'muscular' forms) have been at issue, such as debates over Muslim women's clothing and issues of free speech sparked by rows over satirical cartoons (in Denmark and France, for instance), and the Rushdie affair in Britain<sup>1</sup>. Multiculturalism's focus is narrower than some post-liberal accounts, such as Milbank and Pabst's focus on 'the two liberalisms' of the socio-cultural and the economic-political. It is narrower too than the account of recognition offered by Honneth (1995), and especially in relation to the subsequent debate around recognition and redistribution Honneth had with Fraser (2003). The form of recognition being focussed on here with multiculturalism has little to say about economic forms of recognition as found in these accounts, beyond pointing to socio-economic inequalities as a structural aspect of patterns of discrimination and a lack of recognition. Multiculturalism is more concerned with political recognition specifically, but on points related to social groups, group rights, and advocacy of public religion as a public good, it shares some overlapping concerns and orientations with post-liberals as set against liberalism. A more expansive conception of recognition in relation to multiculturalism would indeed be a useful exercise, but given the lack of an account of this type in the multiculturalism under consideration here, it is beyond the scope of this article.

My focus in this article is, moreover, narrower still. I am specifically concerned with multiculturalism's conception of religion. I want to go on to consider in more detail this final aspect of multiculturalism's accommodative stance towards public religion. Drawing on work by political theologians, we will see how when

<sup>1</sup> It has been commented that multiculturalism "properly takes off" in Britain with the Rushdie affair [Modood, 2016: 483].



looked at more closely multiculturalism in fact reflects a secular bias, albeit one grounded more in liberal secular realities than liberal secular theory, resulting from its emergence out of, and primary concern with, anti-racism. The following sections explore two aspects of multiculturalism along these lines, in relation to identity, and the accommodation of religion in the public sphere. It is argued that this critical engagement forces new thinking for multiculturalists when it comes to considering religion as such – questions that multiculturalism should, but also can, say more about.

### **Multiculturalism and religious ‘identity’**

The first area where we might see a shortcoming in multiculturalism specifically related to religion is in how identity is conceived. There are two lines of critique we can highlight here, one which is more about identity as such, and the other about political identity, or the politics of identity, or identity politics as it is often called.

With regard to the first what we can note is that in talking about religious identity, multiculturalism is in fact concerned with *ethno*-religious identity. This stems from multiculturalism’s emergence out of anti-racism concerns and specifically the central place of Muslims for its theorising. Multiculturalism emphasises the cultural embeddedness of humans as ‘cultural beings’ [Parekh 2006: 125], and, following its anti-racism orientation, is particularly concerned with ethno-religious identities based on involuntary lines of descent. That is to say that religious identity, conceived as ethno-religious, privileges the ethnic as a marker of and proxy for the religious. It is not principally concerned with, for example, the identity ‘Muslim’ as a religious identity as such, but with how people as a result of being from a predominantly Muslim ethnic group can be seen as Muslim by others regardless of what or whether they have any religious convictions, and how people of this same group might identify as Muslim along ethnic and cultural lines, again regardless of any particular religious belief or practices. As multiculturalism emphasises, this might manifest in the experience of discrimination, where the strong link between ethnicity and religion is something imposed from the outside. Alternatively, it might be part of positive identity making and assertiveness, where minorities themselves challenge inferiorised negative identities “transform[ing] [them] into something for which civic respect can be won” [Modood 2007: 41].

There are sound sociological reasons for this, and I do not wish here to bring these into question, but one result is that whereas humans as ‘cultural beings’ become a focus for recognition, the same is not extended to humans as ‘religious beings’.



By effectively reducing the religious to the ethnic, multiculturalism reproduces a secular reading of identity that is unable to account for how recognition might in fact here be its own form of misrecognition. Religion, it has been argued, “can be a deeper formative force than culture or ethnicity, even though it is certainly shaped by them” [Chaplin 2011: 56; also Sealy 2021; Song 2009]. Moreover, some have called into question the capacity of the term ‘identity’ to fully capture how religious people and groups express and understand their faith and their religious worldview [Pennington 2020: 51]. In this sense multiculturalism’s terms themselves might “foreshorten the reality” [Taylor 2007: 509] being studied [Sealy 2021]. This is not to deny that there may be overlap between religion and ethnicity, but the two should not be a priori conflated, or the religious reduced or folded into the ethnic.

This has implications for how religion is thought about in society, not least because it leads to a position where religion-as-group-identity is opposed to religion-as-faith without seeing the profound, and socio-political, connections between the two. It is to this aspect of multicultural recognition, in relation to the accommodation of religion in the public sphere, that the following section turns. In particular it picks up on an argument made by Jonathan Chaplin that “where public life and institutions are principally governed as if transcendent religious authority is irrelevant—it will in practice almost inevitably lean towards programmatic secularism, if only by default’ [Chaplin 2008: 23]. That is to say that, where multiculturalism does not explicitly engage with questions provoked by a specific ‘religious ear’, it is in danger of reproducing a secularist bias of misrecognition with implications for how religion is part of the public good.

### **Multiculturalism and the accommodation of religion on the public sphere**

As has already been noted, multiculturalism sees religion as a public good in that it “can play a significant role in relation to ethical voice general social well-being, cultural heritage, national ceremonies and national identity” [Modood 2017: 55-56]. There are two aspects to this we can highlight here. The first that the national church (more specifically in this case the established Church of England) operates as a national church for all and not just its members, especially in so far as it serves to facilitate the inclusion on minorities. The second is that it supports state-religion connections, as, for example, found in the way the state partners with religious organisations in the third sector in welfare service provision, or in education. Moreover, the type of ‘thickening’ of religion in the national imagination and public sphere that has been called for by faith organisations [for example, Pennington 2020: 20], through the inclusion of more religious festivals, not fewer

for instance, is entirely consistent with a form of additive multicultural thickening. Yet, the key part of the issue raised in the last section and that has implications here is as much epistemological as it is institutional.

In terms of welfare service provision, it is perhaps not too much of an exaggeration to say that state welfare would be severely disabled if not collapse without the roles of and partnerships with churches and faith-based organisations [Dinham 2015: 109; 2009]. These kinds of arrangements are recognised as being instances of positive inclusion of religion in the public sphere, and this is certainly the case. Yet, following on from the previous section we can also take a more critical look at these arrangements which necessarily complicate this. Political theologians, for instance, have been critical of this straightforward position.

Bretherton [2010; 2019] is critical of a situation in which the church is little more than an interest group. He recognises that the kinds of relations and accommodations that seem to constitute positive forms of recognition and of religion as a public good, and organised religion's role in developing the public good, can increase the role and visibility of faith organisations. However, he also cautions that a result of these relations with the state often means that faith organisations have to mimic secular organisations through processes of 'institutional isomorphism' in order to enter into such partnerships. This, he suggests, can distort faith groups themselves and work to depoliticise them in the way that sideline the specific faith ethos of the organisations. It is in fact this depoliticisation of religion that the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams too challenges, arguing against the "mortgag[ing] [of ] the Church<sup>2</sup> to partnership in a rather bland global ethic" [2001: 71]. Consequently, Bretherton cautions the church about partnering with the state and calls it to interrogate the conditions of such partnerships. The force of Bretherton's argument is that these roles can be reductive, instrumentalist and functionalist processes of 'co-option, competition, and commodification' [2010: 2; see also Pennington 2020]. He argues that the church should not derive its social and political role and vision from outside of its belief and practice, which would recognise religion's critical role in sustaining social and political relations. One important question it provokes is on whose terms and on whose frame of reference recognition is made, what misinterpretations and misunderstandings might follow, and, moreover, what effect this has on social and political relations. We might see this as the political and policy equivalent of Milbank's [2006 (1990)] excoriation

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<sup>2</sup> his direct concern is with the Anglican Church.

of the social sciences, and particularly social theory, as effectively 'policing the sublime'. This point of the depoliticisation of religion raises the important issue of the policy implications of the altered character of the relationship between state and religion, although such considerations are necessarily beyond the scope of this article, where the focus returns to multiculturalism's conceptualisations of religion more specifically.

Taking these positions from the political theologians discussed above into account, multiculturalism requires a conceptual rethink of how its own terms might effectively draw the religious ethos, motivations and orientations as part of an argumentative public square and its contribution to the public good into the language and cognitive frames of the secular. The arrangements that multiculturalism might more readily and unproblematically accept in positive terms are in fact more problematic than appears. Chaplin has argued, for instance, that if public institutions do not operate on the basis of faith being a relevant factor that needs its own due consideration, they will by default tend to disregard it with secularising effects [Chaplin 2008: 23]. This is something that multiculturalism has so far said nothing about but represents a clear challenge for multicultural thinking and how and why institutional political relations occur. Nevertheless, multiculturalism has the capacity to accommodate such a position. There is a clear parallel between a multiculturalist position that argues "We must accept what is important to people, and we must be even-handed between the different identity formations" [Modood 2015 [1997]: 170], on the one hand, and, on the other hand for example, Williams' position on a multiculturalism "that brings into public democratic debate the most significant motivating elements in people's convictions about human dignity and destiny" [2012: 108-109]. This is significant in so far as a core part of the methodology of multicultural political theory is that the experiences of the groups themselves must be an important part of the considerations of reaching normative judgements.

What is perhaps more at issue is not so much a lack of capacity within multiculturalism's terms, i.e. that multiculturalism is necessarily in conflict with these arguments from political theology, but that it does require an articulation of how multiculturalism might be compatible, and therefore, how these positions might be consistent with and able to come under the umbrella of an expansive multiculturalism that can be inclusive of the religious on its own terms, not merely as a proxy for ethnicity or a concern of anti-racism, and also push multiculturalism to address questions that it has so far said little or nothing about. This is as much

a matter of epistemic inclusion as it is institutional arrangements, where epistemic openness requires that multiculturalism pays attention to religion within its own scope. While multiculturalism has focussed on the latter, it has said little about the former in these terms. It requires then that multiculturalism be a part of critically questioning the scope and character of such relations and accommodations, and that it considers questions of religion and faith as such in these. To return to the first aspect noted at the opening of this section, this applies, on the one hand, to the established Church of England. While it might be right to insist that a Church operating as a national church play a positive role in facilitating the inclusion of faith in the public sphere in general, and religious minorities in particular, the Church cannot be functionally limited in such a way where it loses its own distinction.

We can develop this further looking at how Chaplin [2021] distinguished between two types of equality important for considering the place of religion in law, policy and the public imagination. Chaplin argues that while religious pluralism as freedom of conscience has been secured, a type of *ethical* pluralism in which religious groups can exercise their freedom to practice and live by alternative value systems is curtailed. Chaplin observes how where there is tension between, on the one hand, the freedom for religious organisations to operate according to their religious ethos and values, and, on the other hand, more equality driven perspectives, it is the latter that tends to prevail and thus there has been a trend towards more restrictions on religious freedoms. Chaplin cites well-known legal cases, such as where a Catholic adoption agency was ordered to place children with same-sex couples, going against their conscience and moral doctrine, or lose their charitable status, and where a marriage registrar in an area of London who refused to conduct civil partnerships for same-sex couples on account of her Christian faith was threatened with dismissal, and lost her case at the Court of Appeal and at the European Court of Human Rights. In both of these cases, as well as others, Chaplin argues that ethical pluralism and the freedom of organisations to operate according to their religious conscience and values were restricted in favour of them adopting a secular view and mode of operation. Moreover, and importantly, there were reasonable forms of accommodation that could be made in both cases; there were other registrars available to conduct same-sex civil partnerships, for instance. The balance between the freedom of religion and equalities law in these and other cases is perhaps inevitably difficult and riddled with tensions, but, what Chaplin argues is that we should seek greater parity and more fully explore matters and options of reasonable accommodation of ethical pluralism where possible.

A second point relates to the final part of Williams' quote above – 'people's convictions about human dignity and destiny'. This also points to how multiculturalism's own orientation, its starting point of negative difference, must also be reconsidered. The remit here is wider. It is not focussed on, nor does it emanate from, concerns derived predominantly from considering minority-majority relations. For what these positions emanating from political theology emphasise is not, or certainly not merely, the idea of turning a negative into a positive, but of beginning with positive conceptions themselves. Thus, when Modood, talking about the positive inclusion of religious groups emphasises a minority identity: "The demand here is that religion in general, *or at least the category of 'Muslim' in particular* should be a category by which the inclusiveness of social institutions may be judged..." [2019: 120, emphasis added], is too narrowly conceived for a wider post-liberal political vision. This requires greater latitude needed for faith-based providers to offer services in ways consistent with their values and shift from an attitude of the state permitting or admitting faith-based organisations into the public sector to one of the state supporting and integrating them [Chaplin 2021].

However, we need not see multiculturalism as too narrowly hampered and can point to two of its features to show how multiculturalism might be well positioned as an accommodative post liberal form of politics when it comes to considering the place of religion. The first is multiculturalism's emphasis on group rights alongside individual rights already suggests that such a position on ethical pluralism can be consistent with it, although the terms need to be worked out and we can only be suggestive of this here.

The other is multiculturalism's emphasis on dialogue. Multiculturalism proposes a form of dialogical hermeneutics that may be well-placed as a framework to develop not just inter-faith, and intra-faith, dialogue, but also dialogue between faith and non-faith partners, and a basis for democratic political dialogue more broadly in a context of ethical pluralism. A form of multicultural dialogue, or what Modood has called a 'multi-logue', draws on the Gadamerian concept of horizons as a procedural way of engaging value pluralism. This means recognising 'being-value' [Gadamer 2013 [1960]: 246] and investigating this situated in social and political relations. Our horizons are our 'range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point' (Gadamer 2013 [1960]: 313). Underlying horizons are prejudices, but prejudice for Gadamer can have either a positive or negative value and are more generally the fore-meanings of how "we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live"

[2013 [1960]: 289]. This is an important part of the dialogue, and cornerstone of a multicultural dialogical approach as it recognises the identity-richness of the dialogue partners and the context in which they work. Crucially, understanding and accounting for these prejudices have the goal of opening us up rather than closing us off to understanding, such that ‘the solution is *genuinely open*’ and constructive of relations [Modood 2017: 86, emphasis added]. This then can provide the basis of multicultural engagements of value or ethical pluralism and for working out a common policy.

### Conclusion

What we might call the post-liberal moment is at least in important part suggested by the reality of multiculturalism, and efforts to think about the implications of this for society and politics.

Multiculturalism as a political theory, at least in the variant considered here, has responded to this by questioning important premises of liberalism, notably of its emphasis on individual rights and the idea of neutrality. To the former it highlights that such formal rights can never be ‘blind’, and that individual rights require balancing with group rights. To the latter, it holds that neutrality is a myth that masks its own cultural particularity.

Part of multiculturalism’s response has also been to argue for the public good of religion, and that religion can and should be positively supported in the public sphere through state-religion connections. In this it chimes with strands of post-liberal thought that emphasise value pluralism, and especially those, prominent in British post-liberal thought, that are particularly concerned with the place of religion in society and politics. Multiculturalism, however, lacks a clear and coherent statement in these terms. This is partly because its focus has in large part been more narrowly focussed on minority-majority issues, especially those more directly centred on Muslims, and partly because as a result some of its core concepts and assumptions have obscured more particularly religious concerns. This is notable, for instance, in its fundamental identity concept of *ethno-religious*, which it derives principally out of concerns of anti-racism, but which struggles to capture anything distinctly religious, and which has been accused of being unnecessarily secularising [Murad 2020; Birt 2018]. These shortcomings have been shown through an engagement with thought emerging from the vantage point of a few notable political theologians, where it was seen how multiculturalism’s conception of identity and of institutional arrangements under state-religion connections

required further consideration. In important ways then, a multicultural response to the questions raised is not immediately obvious.

Nevertheless, this article has argued that multiculturalism does offer the resources to accommodate the debates that have been highlighted in relation to religion and its accommodation in the public sphere. It has done so by drawing from multiculturalism's wider resources and orientations, in some cases re-orienting them. It has shown how multiculturalism's premises of even-handedness between identity formations when more evenly applied, its emphasis on group rights alongside individual rights, its emphasis on dia- (or multi-)logue can be considered in ways conducive to an articulation of a form of multicultural politics where questions of religion can be taken on their own terms. This article has been suggestive in this regard, while a fuller articulation must be the subject of future work.

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