

**Overlapping Consensus:**  
**A Model for Moral Education and Moral Deliberation in Pluralistic Societies**

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CONTENTS	2
Abstract	4
Résumé	5
Introduction	6
Acknowledgments	9
1. <u>The Moral Challenge of Pluralism</u>	10
1.1 Multicultural Challenge	13
1.2 Values Clarification	19
1.3 Moral Reasoning	21
1.4 Just Community	25
1.5 Pluralism in Multicultural Context	27
1.6 Multiculturalism and Morality: Five Models	31
1.7 Narrative Approach	36
2. <u>Overlapping Consensus – Possibility for Moral Education and Moral Deliberation</u>	40
2.1 Rawls's Political Conception of Justice Clarified	40
2.2 Overlapping Consensus	47
2.3 Conversation and Consensus	56
2.4 Political Liberalism and Its Justification	58
2.5 Rawls's Comprehensive Foundations	60
2.6 Abolitionist Consensus in Britain	65
2.7 Areas of Overlap	69
2.8 Political Conception of the Abolitionists	71
2.9 Implications for Moral Education and Moral Deliberation	73
3. <u>Multicultural Narratives – A Vehicle for Enhancing Overlapping Consensus</u>	78
3.1 Personal and Emotional Component of Moral Reasoning	79
3.2 Narrative Moral Exemplars	81
3.3 Dickens's Narrative Philosophy	83
3.4 Multicultural Narrative Consensus	88
4. <u>Narrative and Moral Perception</u>	96
4.1 Moral Perception	96
4.2 Perceptive Equilibrium: Role of Novel	97
4.3 Nussbaum's Perception: A Problem	111
4.4 Overcoming Dominance	120
5. <u>Recognition as the Moral Prerequisite for Multicultural Equality in Public Speech</u>	126
5.1 The Multicultural Approach	131
5.2 The Cross Fertilization of Cultures	133
5.3 Against Ethnocentrism of All Kinds	138

6.	<u>Traditional Councils – A Structure for the Facilitating of Overlapping Consensus</u>	141
6.1	Assemblies and Councils	142
6.2	Councils: A Foundation for Democracy	144
6.3	North American Democratic Traditions	145
6.4	Discursive Democracy	152
6.5	Conclusions	157
	References	159



### Abstract

Pluralism, the variety of philosophical, moral, cultural and religious worldviews of contemporary society, is a characteristic of Western democracies. This places upon such societies a great challenge for the teaching of moral principles in schools and for the establishment of such principles in the public sphere. John Rawls's political idea of an overlapping consensus is a principle of decision-making that can be used as a model for arriving at principles for moral education and also as a model for moral deliberation in the public domain. Multicultural narratives can play an important role in enhancing the creation of an overlapping consensus on public moral issues in pluralistic societies. They can be examples of the kinds of challenges involved in the moral decision process and also serve to illustrate the importance of moral perception as a complement to moral reflection in the task of moral deliberation. Teaching the multicultural nature of modern civilization and also the universal incidence of the democratic council tradition can strengthen citizens' sense of mutual respect in the course of public speech. This can help to develop a culture that is more open to the formation of an overlapping consensus on matters that concern public morality.

## Résumé

Le pluralisme dans sa diversité philosophique, morale, culturelle et religieuse est aujourd'hui la caractéristique des démocraties occidentales. Cela présente pour celles-ci un défi quant à l'enseignement des principes moraux à l'école et à la mise en œuvre de tels principes dans la sphère publique. L'idée avancée par John Rawls d'un consensus de recoupement au plan politique offre une méthode de prise de décision pouvant être utilisée comme modèle autant pour dégager des principes d'éducation morale que pour la délibération morale dans le domaine public. Les récits narratifs multiculturels peuvent jouer un rôle important dans la création d'un consensus de recoupement concernant des questions de moralité publique dans les sociétés pluralistes. Ils peuvent fournir des exemples du genre de défis impliqués dans la prise de décision morale et ainsi illustrer l'importance de la perception morale en tant que complément à la réflexion morale dans les tâches de délibération. L'enseignement sur la nature multiculturelle de la civilisation moderne ainsi que l'incidence universelle de la tradition démocratique de délibération peut accroître chez les citoyens dans la dynamique du discours public. Cela peut contribuer au développement d'une culture plus ouverte à la formation d'un consensus de recoupement en ce qui concerne des questions relevant de la moralité publique.

## Introduction

This study seeks to make a contribution to the disciplines of moral philosophy, moral education and the field of democratic practice by applying John Rawls's political idea of an overlapping consensus to the practice of moral education and public moral deliberation in pluralistic societies (Rawls, 1996: 133-172). When we consider the terrible, global legacy that contesting political, religious, cultural and moral doctrines have left us, it is important for us to appreciate the need for the concept of consensus to be a part of our lives. In my own personal life I have been presented with the value of this.

My early years in Guyana were those of a Black Christian living in the village of La Penitence, Demerara. My friends and neighbours in La Penitence were mostly, but not entirely, Muslim and Hindu East Indians. My next-door neighbours and friends east of us were Chinese. A few houses to the east of them lived a devout Hindu pundit and as a child I attended a kindergarten school that was located on the premises of a Hindu Temple. Observing Hindu religious devotions and inspecting photographs of Hindu deities were part of my daily kindergarten life. Later, during my early primary school years, I studied Islam and Urdu with my next-door, boyhood, Muslim friends who lived west of us, when the Imam came to their home to give them their religious lessons. My mother told me that as a child she used to learn Hindi. St. Stephen's Church of Scotland School was my elementary school. Both at elementary and high school, my classmates were not only Black and East Indian, but also Chinese, Amerindian, White and various mixtures of all – almost all born in Guyana to Guyanese parents. Trinidad and Tobago, the country of my birth, with which I later became familiar, was similar to Guyana in its ethnic and religious composition. During my teens, when Guyana became racially violent, my family migrated to Grenada and I

eventually had the experience of living through part of the 1979 Marxist revolution that occurred there. In addition to all of this, my younger years, the sixties and the seventies, were the years of the independence movements in the Caribbean. High schools in the sixties were fora for stimulating debates on the history and politics of the Caribbean region.

My previous training is in the field of theology. My master's thesis was entitled, *The role of scripture in the cause of british west indian emancipation*. It was a study in the development of antislavery biblical theology from 1671 to 1824, and its influence upon Britain and upon the British West Indian slave plantation society. In the summer of 1986, my interest in moral issues led me to participate in a study session of the International Institute of Human Rights, University of Strasbourg, France.

These are a few of the experiences that influenced me from an early age, right up to the present, to be concerned about issues of morality in pluralistic societies. This study is a reflection of that concern and it therefore seeks to construct a path for moral education and moral deliberation that respects the reality of pluralism.

In chapter one, I consider the challenge of pluralism: the difficulty of determining what values we ought to establish in the public sphere. This chapter highlights the importance of working towards some form of consensus.

Chapter two is the bulwark of the study. In it I analyse John Rawls's idea of an overlapping consensus and show that it can be applied to the exercise of moral decision making in societies that are characterized by a variety of philosophical and religious worldviews. This chapter also contains a discussion on the historic precedent of the formation of overlapping consensus in Britain on the cause of the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century.

Chapter three argues for the importance of narrative as an aspect of the pedagogical and deliberative process in the moral sphere; while chapter four discusses how narrative, particularly as a perceptive exercise, can contribute to the process of moral education and the establishing of public moral principles.

In chapter five I contend, somewhat in the language of Charles Taylor, that recognition of the multicultural nature of modern civilization and incorporating the information into our school curricula, are necessary steps for encouraging respect for the multicultural voices within modern democracies. Full acceptance of the narratives of the multicultural voices' as part of the moral conversation is vital if an overlapping consensus is to emerge within our democracies. In this chapter I cite specific examples of the kinds of information that can be included in our curricula.

Chapter six recommends a structure to facilitate the formation of an overlapping consensus on moral issues – the structure being the practice of the council method of discussion and deliberation as a school and community project. This structure can provide both children and adults with the skills necessary for the working out of an overlapping consensus on moral or any other issue for that matter.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE MORAL CHALLENGE OF PLURALISM

Pluralism in our contemporary Western societies is creating immense challenges for the teaching of moral education. J. Mark Halstead points out that “growing cultural diversity (and therefore diversity of values) within all western societies” is one of the sources of the problems complicating the teaching of moral education (Halstead, 1996 in Halstead and Taylor: 3). Halstead recognizes that there are widely divergent views both on what values are, and also on the various values people hold. Concerning the nature of values, he observes that there are three general views in existence. The first is that values are “a set of subjective criteria for making judgements.” The second is that values are absolute: “applying everywhere at all times.” The third is that values are socially constructed and “may vary overtime from one group to another.” Halstead also recognizes that in a pluralistic society “not everyone shares the same values or even understanding of what values are” (Halstead, 1996 in Halstead & Taylor: 6-7). Consequently, the multicultural nature of Western societies presents a challenge for the teaching of moral education and for the establishing of moral principles in the public domain, both in our seeking to determine what exactly are values, and also in our deciding what values we should espouse. Because of this, pluralistic societies need to subscribe to principles that respect the reality of pluralism: principles that respect the variety of worldviews held by their citizens and their institutions. John Rawls (1921-2002) in the enunciation of his political conception of justice, points out that a modern democracy is characterized by a plurality of incompatible yet reasonable comprehensive doctrines – religious, moral and philosophical doctrines that determine our conception of the good and inform our understanding of the purpose of life and society in

general – doctrines that determine our value system (Rawls, 1996: xviii, 13). In a pluralistic democracy, according to Rawls, these doctrines vary greatly, but when they are reasonable they can forge a political conception of justice that is the result of an overlapping consensus (10). For Rawls, this is a political project. In our case, however, the concerns are moral, with political and social ramifications. Therefore, the particular challenge of pluralism to which this discussion responds is: how do we go about the teaching of morals and the establishing of public moral principles in a society that respects this reality of pluralism? Consequently, my thesis is: John Rawls’s political idea of an overlapping consensus can be used as a model for the practice of moral education and for the establishment of public moral principles in pluralistic democracies. Cognitive reflection, and emotive perception through multicultural narratives, ought to be the basis for creating that consensus.

Before proceeding with the main task of this chapter, I wish to offer a brief explanation for focusing my discussion in this study on Rawls’s concept of overlapping consensus as outlined in *Political liberalism*. My choice requires explanation for at least two reasons. First, political liberalism is only one of the many variants of liberal political theory, and my discussion pays little attention to other versions – most notably the numerous versions of what Rawls terms ‘comprehensive liberalism’ advanced by theorists such as John Dewey, Jurgen Habermas, John Stuart Mill (Dewey, 1966; Habermas, 1979, 1995; Mill, 1979). My decision to focus primarily on political liberalism over other forms of liberal political theory has been influenced heavily by the work of Kenneth Strike. As Strike points out, Rawls’s approach represents a pragmatic form of liberalism that is more amenable to the reality of pluralism than is the grounded form of liberalism represented by Jurgen Habermas and John Dewey, for example (Strike, 1994: 10,11). Proponents of

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grounded liberalism base their arguments upon secular premises that they consider to be “rationally superior” to others. Strike observes:

Views of this sort will see the civic language as the political application of a general and comprehensive ethical theory that is defended as the most reasonable view against other contenders. That it is rationally superior is the reason why it is binding on others regardless of whether they agree (10).

Second, Rawls’s version of political liberalism is by now only one of many versions of political liberalism; and again my study virtually ignores other variants. I choose to focus on Rawls for a couple of reasons. First, his statement of political liberalism has by far been the most influential in the field of educational theory. [e.g. Callan, Macedo, Blacker]. Nevertheless, the existing literature has focused almost exclusively on the implications of Rawls’s theory for civic education, and not for moral education or moral deliberation more broadly speaking. Second, his version of political liberalism has, due its enormous influence, generated an equally enormous secondary literature. It seemed, therefore, impractical to attempt to broaden the scope of this study to include an assessment of tribal debates among different and conflicting proponents of political liberalism, without sacrificing depth of analysis in other areas of my discussion - - specifically, in my analysis of Rawls’s work or my examination of the implications his work for moral education and moral deliberation. These are obviously limitations to the current study, but surely not unreasonable ones.

With these provisos in mind, I now begin the work of the dissertation in earnest.

First, this chapter seeks to give a survey of several significant problems relating to the teaching of values in a pluralistic democratic society. The purpose of this survey is not to

provide an exhaustive overview, but rather to illustrate, through a discussion of some salient examples, the complexity of the challenge moral pluralism presents to philosophers and practitioners of moral education. Second, the chapter briefly reviews the major attempts scholars of moral education have previously made to point out a path for accomplishing the goal of a sound moral pedagogy. In this discussion the position taken is that in the public domain values ought to be socially constructed. We shall discuss this challenge and indicate why we need a new method for the establishment of public moral principles in pluralistic societies – a method that strives for consensus rather than for philosophical, religious or political dominance. No new philosophical doctrine is advanced for the content of moral education. Our discussion is in the area of methodology. The content of moral education will be that consensus which emerges in each society where it is formed.

### **1.1 Multicultural Challenge**

A contention arose in Quebec that is a fine example of the kinds of moral challenges pluralistic societies can present to contemporary democracies. It is the case of the Sikh kirpan. The case highlights the questions of religion, philosophy, law and ethics, which can emerge when one seeks to arrive at moral judgements in a pluralistic milieu. In November 2001, Gurbaj Singh, a twelve-year-old Sikh boy and student of Sainte Catherine-Labouré School, (Montreal), was playing in the schoolyard when his kirpan fell from him. A kirpan is a letter opener-like ceremonial dagger worn by all baptized Sikhs. A series of articles in *The Montreal Gazette* outlines the case. Ann Carroll (2002) states in her article a number of the tenets of the Sikh faith. She writes:

The baptized Sikh agrees to pray every morning and evening, to forego alcohol, tobacco and adultery and to observe the five Ks: kesh (uncut hair), kanga (comb), kara (bracelet), kacha (undergarment) and kirpan (dagger).

The five Ks have spiritual meaning for believers: uncut hair is considered a mark of holiness and simplicity; the wooden comb symbolizes cleanliness; the plain undergarment represents chastity; the steel bracelet is a symbol of dedication; the sheathed kirpan stands for justice and inner strength (Carroll, May 16: A7).

Carroll continues: "Kirpans are usually made of iron or steel, have a blade of at least 10 centimetres in length, and cannot be removed or used to assault anyone" (Carroll, May 16: A7). Gurbaj's kirpan sparked off a major controversy in Quebec. School authorities banned the boy from returning to school with the kirpan, considering it to be a dagger and therefore a weapon and a security threat to members of the school. In April 2002, the boy's family won a temporary court injunction allowing him to return to school with the kirpan. The judge stipulated that the kirpan was to be wrapped in a cloth sheath and worn under his clothing (Carroll, May 16: A7). Upon the 12 year old boy's return he was met outside the school by jeering youths with taunts of "Paki," a racial slur (Carroll, May 16: A7).

On May 17, 2002, Justice Danielle Grenier, of the Quebec Superior Court ruled that Gurbaj Singh may wear his kirpan to school under the following conditions: (1) The kirpan must be enclosed in a wooden sheath, which in turn must be encased in a cloth pouch "sewn shut and securely stitched to a carrying strap." (2) The pouch with its contents must be concealed under his clothing. (3) Gurbaj ought not to remove the kirpan

from its sheath at school and if he lost it, he was required to report the loss immediately to authorities at school (Carroll, May 18, A1).

In another article Catherine Solyom (2002) writes: “Apart from having a camera crew flanking him, Gurbaj Singh returned to school in LaSalle yesterday morning just like every other twelve-year-old boy. There was no police escort, no protesters, no insults – just the normal bustle of a school day.” Solyom reports one parent’s comments: “At first I was against him coming to school with a kirpan, and I was concerned about safety...but then people became racist against him and I thought they shouldn’t stop him from coming to school. Education comes first.” But this was not the end of the story. Allison Hanes (2002) reports that on May 27, the Quebec Government announced that it would appeal the ruling of the Superior Court.

Manjit Singh, a Sikh chaplain at McGill University, is of the opinion that the kirpan case reveals a double standard. Singh indicates this even before the Quebec government launched its appeal. He was responding to the attitude of the school board in sending the boy home and of parents who had kept their children home when the temporary injunction was given in favour of Gurbaj. Manjit Singh (2002) argues in his article that the nature of the use of the kirpan is similar to the nature of the use of the parliamentary mace. Singh writes:

According to Webster’s dictionary, a mace is “akin to a staff or club used especially in the Middle Ages for breaking armour” and “an ornamental staff borne as a symbol of authority before a public official or a legislative body.” No one has ever questioned that some day, some member of one of these chambers, in a fit of rage, could use this weapon to attack a fellow member. The point of this

discussion is that through mutual consent and historical tradition, this lethal weapon has come to represent the authority of the state.

Singh continues:

The situation with respect to the Sikh kirpan is the same. What is extremely disconcerting in this case is that a double standard has come into play. It appears that Eurocentric cultural values enjoy a higher rating than those of minorities. The value of the kirpan as an article of faith precludes its use as an offensive weapon.

The school board and parents also rejected this argument.

What is even more significant is that the Quebec Government also rejected this argument.

Allison Lampert observes that with the announcement of the Quebec Government's appeal, the Commission Scolaire Marguerite Bourgeoys began taking steps to have the Quebec Superior Court decision struck down. Don McPherson (2002) explains that the superior court decision is applicable only to the elementary school the boy attended during the last school year. It does not apply to the high school he is to attend during the following school year. Macpherson reports that the school board announced "that it would ask the Appeal Court for permission to ban him from high school until the court ruled on the appeal."

The Sikh family gave up. Angus Loten (2002) reported that Gurbaj said he was tired of the conflict. An application was made for Gurbaj to attend a private high school run by the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The school accepted him with his kirpan. Macpherson states: "And how is this for irony? His new school is run by the Seventh Day Adventists, a denomination more tolerant of the symbol of his religion than is a public

school board.” Macpherson is at a loss to understand why the school board and the Quebec Government do not accept the Superior Court ruling.

The kirpan case illustrates, to some degree, the challenge of finding a consensus that reflects the values of both the majority and the minorities. Of course it may be argued that the Superior Court decision strives to respond both to the need for public safety and the right of freedom of religion. However, as Manjit Singh contends in his article, objects that are connected to the culture of majority ought not to be more highly respected than those of the culture of the minority. Singh uses the example of the parliamentary mace. This a very salient point; but one may still argue that the mace is used in a restricted environment and by adults, while the kirpan is worn in public, even by children. Probably a more comparative object may be a baseball bat. Are there similar restrictions on children carrying baseball bats to school? Is there a difference in perception of a child with a baseball bat and a child with a kirpan? Is there more tolerance for the baseball bat than for the kirpan? These are the kinds of questions a pluralistic approach to society has to address. These are the kinds of issues that we need to continue deliberating – not with the aim of winning the argument, but of creating a consensus that can foster greater peace and mutual respect. A Rawlsian approach to such a problem would seek an overlapping consensus of the moral issues surfacing in the discussion rather than rush off to court to seek to win arguments in an adversarial debate.

The advent of the multicultural nature of contemporary Western democracies has indeed occasioned the need for a modification in the way moral education is conducted and in the way moral principles are established in the public domain. Western democracies are not characterized only by people who are products of the Enlightenment or of the Greek philosophical mindset, but also by people who subscribe to a wide cross section of religious,

philosophical and moral doctrines. Narrative, which is a more universal and intercultural method of teaching morals, needs to play a more prominent role in moral pedagogy and moral deliberation. The degree to which it is employed together with cognitive reflection may be different from community to community depending on the cultural background and composition of the group. Narrative, together with cognitive reflection, nevertheless can become a very important medium for creating moral consensus within a multicultural milieu.

According to Halstead pluralistic societies face the challenge of finding “a basic social morality” that would be respected by all. As a consequence of this there is need for the development of a pedagogical approach to moral education and a public approach to moral deliberation that respects this cultural, religious, and philosophical diversity. In Halstead’s view, what is of paramount importance is the necessity of having a minimum set of common values and standards of behaviour;” or else, as he puts it, “there could be no society at all” (Halstead in Halstead & Taylor, 1996: 7). Halstead points out that in the past; and perhaps, one may even maintain that up to the present, the dominant group of each society was responsible for the establishing of values. These values tended to be middle class values. Conservatives generally stressed issues such as religion, family and national heritage, while liberals advocated principles which they felt could be rationally justified and thus be considered universal. They argued for principles that could be democratically negotiated. Halstead asserts that even under democratic liberal conditions some minority groups may still respond with suspicion and may feel that their traditional way of life is being threatened (Halstead, 1996 in Halstead & Taylor: 7). First Nation peoples constantly argue from the perspective that their aboriginal rights protect

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them from the power of the democracy of the ethnic majority (Dickason, 2002: 322-341).

Minorities can be easily crushed by the moral codes of democratic majorities.

Diversity is also seen in the way societies teach values. Halstead sees Britain and the USA as examples of countries where each reflects one of two traditional approaches of the teaching of values – Britain’s being conservative mainly based upon religion, and the USA’s being liberal and reflective of democratic values. The conservative religious approach sees values as being determined by the traditional institutions of religion, culture and the family, while the liberal approach sees values as being mainly the result of philosophical reflection and individual choice. According to Halstead, there has also been a major debate as to whether schools should “instill values,” or teach students “to explore and develop their own values.” Concerning the former, exemplified by “character education,” Halstead is of the view that it possesses two main problems. The first is “the difficulty of identifying appropriate values and ensuring a consistent approach within the school;” the second is that “the approach pays too little attention to, and may be in direct conflict with, the values the children learn outside the school, from home, the media and their peers” (Halstead, 1996 in Halstead and Taylor: 9-10). Regarding the liberal approach, Halstead admits that this method can help to develop confidence and self esteem in the students. This method, especially in North America, has been popularly associated with the values clarification school.

## 1.2

### Values Clarification

With respect to values clarification, Halstead states: “Values must be (1) chosen freely (2) from alternatives (3) after consideration of the consequences, and an individual



must (4) cherish, (5) publicly affirm, and (6) act on the value, and (7) do so repeatedly.”

Values clarification, according to Halstead, has been criticized “for being rooted in a spurious relativism and for failing to recognize that it is possible to make mistakes in matters of value” (Halstead, 1996 in Halstead & Taylor: 10). Louis Rath (1963) popularized this values clarification model. In this system, students are required to clarify their values. They are requested to respond to questions and are engaged in various forms of enquiry that challenge them to examine and clarify the values they hold; but no attempt is supposed to be made to cast any judgement on the values students espouse (Rath, 1963: 13 – 20). Howard Kirchenbaum, himself a strong proponent of values clarification, in an evaluation of this approach to moral education, states: “With hindsight, we can recognize that values clarification was a good idea that was taken too far” (Kirchenbaum, 1992: 774).

Kirchenbaum admits that values clarification was often superficial and ineffective. He states a number of problems the theory faced in its implementation, then points out that there is “a major conceptual and political flaw in the values clarification theory.” Kirchenbaum states: “We insisted that values clarification by itself was a sufficient method for developing satisfying values and moral behaviour in young people. Critics questioned how this approach could lead to moral behaviour if it was, in fact, “value free,” as its proponents claimed it was” (Kirchenbaum, 1992: 774). Though Kirchenbaum’s criticism is not as radical as the criticism Halstead cites, he does admit that their position was “theoretically flawed” and “politically untenable” in that they relegated the inculcation and modeling of values to the background and suggested that the real work of moral education take place in the clarifying of values. Kirchenbaum concedes: “Suffice it to say for now that we were so passionate about the importance of giving young people the skills necessary to make their

own possible decisions that we overstated our case” (Kirchenbaum, 1992: 774).

Kirchenbaum is admitting that by merely clarifying one’s values one is not necessarily motivated to choose good values or even to determine whether the values clarified are recognized as good or not. This approach is certainly not the type that can be recommended to a pluralistic society where there is already in existence a multiplicity of diverse values. Individuals can clarify their own values within their own value system and still remain deeply divided, antagonistic and even violent towards one another.

Halstead mentions two other approaches which fall under “the explore and develop” model: the “moral reasoning” approach and the “just community” approach:

In *moral reasoning* children are presented with moral dilemmas and are encouraged to discuss them in a way which is intended to help them see the inadequacies of their current moral thinking and move to a higher level (Blatt & Kohlberg, 1975). The *just community* approach is designed to help students to develop responsible moral behaviour by coming to share group norms and a sense of community (Halstead, 1996 in Halstead & Taylor: 10).

### 1.3

### Moral Reasoning

Immanuel Kant (1786) calls for the rational recognition of “the categorical imperative” as the supreme basis of all morality. Kant declares: “The categorical imperative is therefore single and one: “Act from that maxim only which thou canst will law universal” (34). Then Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) identifies “justice” as the highest form of moral reasoning. Kohlberg’s theory of moral development is derived largely from J. Piaget. Kohlberg points out:

[Piaget] claims that both logic and morality develop through stages and that each stage is a structure that, formally considered, is in better equilibrium than its predecessor. It assumes that each new (logical or moral) stage is a new structure that includes elements of earlier structures but transforms them in such a way as to represent a more stable and extensive equilibrium (Kohlberg, 1981: 194).

Kohlberg's theory is also akin to Rawls's concept of reflective equilibrium which we shall discuss later. Kohlberg himself states:

My theory and Rawls's grew out of the same roots: Kant's formal theory in moral philosophy and Piaget's formal theory in psychology. As our theory is tied to empirical data on the moral judgements of hundreds of subjects, while Rawls's theory has no data except philosophical introspection, this correspondence strengthens Rawls's theory as an explanation of moral judgement (Kohlberg, 1981: 192).

In his work, Kohlberg argues that moral development takes place in a person at three levels subdivided into six stages.

#### Preconventional Level

This level is represented by stages one and two. At this level the individual is responsive to cultural rules and interprets them in terms of punishment and rewards in response to the physical power of the authority laying down the rules. In stage one, the physical consequence of an action determines its morality. In stage two, what is right is that which satisfies my needs and occasionally the needs of others. Fairness and reciprocity are physical and pragmatic. It is the good ethic of the market place.

### Conventional Level

At this level, loyalty to the family or group is the right choice. In stage three, good behaviour is that which pleases the group. In stage four, right conduct is that which maintains social order. One does one's duty.

### Postconventional Level

Here, rightness is based upon principles: in stage five, the right is based on standards agreed on by society not merely to maintain social order but with the possibility for change through negotiation. In stage six, right is defined by the conscience. It leads to universal ethical principles. Kohlberg states:

Right is defined by the decision of the conscience in accord with self chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. These principles are abstract and ethical (the Golden Rule, the categorical imperative); they are not concrete moral rules such as the Ten Commandments. At heart, these are universal principles of justice, of reciprocity and equality of human rights, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individuals (Kohlberg, 1981:19).

Kohlberg uses an individual's response to the famous Heinz's dilemma to determine that person's stage of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981: 12 – 17).

Later on in this work, Kohlberg stipulates that for the concept of justice to function as the universal moral guideline, it must be reversible: you must act as you expect everyone to act towards you when in the same situation (Kohlberg, 1981: 197 – 200). This, obviously, is very Kantian (Kant, 1886: 34). This is the principle of universalizability: you must act in a manner based upon principles that you would desire

to be made into universal law. Or as Kant himself explains it: “Act as if the maxim of thy will were to become, by thy adopting it, a universal law of nature” (34). Kohlberg stipulates that for the concept of justice to function as the universal moral guideline, it must be reversible: “We must be willing to live with our judgement or decision when we trade places with others in the situation being judged” (Kohlberg, 1981: 197). So then, for Kohlberg, the categorical imperative becomes universal, reversible justice and this is the highest stage of moral development. Kohlberg maintains that his stage 6 level of moral development is parallel to John Rawls’s principle of reflective equilibrium in *A theory of justice* (Kohlberg, 1981: 201). Reflective equilibrium is the process whereby persons by cognitive reflection ensure that their convictions concur with their judgements as they search for a sense of justice (Rawls, 1999a: 17, 18, 42, 43). John Rawls argues that justice is the chief good towards which society ought to strive (Rawls, 1999a: 3). Just principles are fair social and political principles that are chosen by someone who, theoretically, does not know his position or status in society. Rawls calls this position or status the original position (Rawls, 1999a:10-11). This we shall discuss in more detail later. For now, I shall point out that Kohlberg and Rawls (according to Rawls’s position in *A theory of justice*) both see justice as the highest good – Kohlberg for individuals, Rawls for social institutions. Kohlberg declares:

Rawls’s theory is justificatory; it undertakes to prove that certain principles of justice held at Stage 6 (and important at Stage 5) are the ones that would be chosen in the original position. In that case, Rawls claims, they are right or true principles of justice. My psychological claim, parallel to Rawls’s claim, is that something like his principles of justice are chosen by those at Stage 6, and they

are chosen because they are reversible, or in better equilibrium than justice principles used at previous stages (Kohlberg, 1981: 201).

In this model, we still do have to answer the question: how do we overcome the kind of moral reasoning that is based upon concepts that are peculiar to one culture over against another? How do citizens negotiate the differences in moral outlook that spring from their differing philosophical, moral, or religious doctrines? Citizens can engage in moral reasoning and yet remain uncommitted to work together for the establishing of public principles of morality: they reason only within the circle of their own personal value systems without being open to constructing a consensus that can be equitable in a pluralistic society. They can also be severely bereft of sensitivity to particular situations, a sensitivity that is very necessary in multicultural, pluralistic communities where citizens' philosophical, moral and religious concepts can be so diverse.

#### 1.4

#### **Just Community**

The just community model of moral education is an expansion of the moral reasoning model. In effect, it is the practice of moral reasoning in community. In the just community model, a community is made up of about 100 students and five teachers who meet weekly to make rules, enact discipline and plan policies and activities. The aim is to give students the opportunity to be involved in participatory democracy and to develop moral awareness and the skills of self-regulation.

The just community model is based not only upon the notion of justice, but, as the name suggests, also upon the notion of community. Lawrence Kohlberg (1985) explains its principles. Kohlberg points out that the principle of justice is, in this model, linked to "a small political community based upon equal rights." The group makes democratic

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decisions about real life problems and challenges the school faces from time to time as it seeks to survive as a community. In such a milieu students are confronted by teachers and peers to explain any inconsistencies they may demonstrate between their public reasoning and their personal behaviour within the community. Their public reasoning is to be based upon Kohlberg's sixth stage of development. Kohlberg states: "Central to these 'Stage 6' theories is an idealized method of arriving at consensus between rational moral actors as distinct from a Stage 5 democratic majority rule method" (Kohlberg, 1985 in Berkowitz & Oser: 36). This method involves the following principles: (1) ideal role taking – a situation whereby "the claim of each person involved is considered while interpreting this claim based upon his or her requirement to consider or role take the claims of others involved" (36). In addition to this, such a consensus is also arrived at by (2) ideal communication. This requires a "mutual modification of claims and needs of others through a dialogue process which is manifested in an ideal communication free of domination or manipulation." (3) This kind of consensus is achieved by ideal liberty: the principle whereby one is independent from the constraints of another's will "insofar as it is compatible with the freedom of everyone else in accordance with a universal law" (36-37).

With regard to the notion of community, Kohlberg points out that this aspect of the model concerns the question of the "good." This "includes the ideals of altruism or responsibility of persons to and for one another and for participation in the affairs of the community" (38). Quoting John Dewey, Kohlberg states:

We must realize the fact that regard for self and regard for others are both secondary phases of a more normal and complete interest, regard for the welfare

and integrity of the social groups of which we form a part. The family, for example, is something other than one person, plus another, plus another. It is an enduring form of association in which each member gets direction for his conduct by thinking of the whole group and his place in it, rather than an adjustment of egoism and altruism (Kohlberg, 1985 in Berkowitz & Oser: 38).

The just community model is aimed at creating a microcosm of a democratic society in which the ideals of equal rights and the public good are exemplified, the whole process being a method of moral education. The question remains, however: how do we respond to the pluralistic challenge where concepts of the public good are widely diverse? The just community approach to moral reasoning is a step in the right direction, but it falls short in that it does not make clear provision for dealing with a diversity of views about conceptions of the public good. Such conceptions and perceptions can be very dissimilar in multicultural societies as we have seen in the case of the kirpan.

### **1.5 Pluralism in Multicultural Context**

Neil Bissoondath (1994) criticizes and indeed rejects what is supposed to be an official Canadian attempt to respond to the pluralistic challenge as it is further illustrated by the multicultural struggle that exists within Canadian society: the struggle to establish values in our multicultural context. Our societies are not only pluralistic in the area of citizens' value systems, but they are also pluralistic in the sphere of the value systems reflected in the various cultural groups existing in our communities. The kirpan case is not simply an issue relating to Gurbaj Singh's family and the school board. It is also and probably more so an issue relating to the Sikh community and the rest of the Quebec community, especially when one takes into consideration the response of the Quebec

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government to the disagreement. Obviously, the values adhered to by the various cultural groups is another area where there need for the kind of consensus of which Rawls speaks.

Bissoondath rejects Canadian multiculturalism from a socio-political perspective. He cites from the Canadian Multiculturalism Act:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada to (a) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage (39).

Multiculturalism is purported to be a method of recognizing diversity and promoting respect for the various cultures and ethnic groups in Canada. But multiculturalism as it stands, according to Bissoondath, has been rejected by Canadians. He cites two national surveys as the grounds for his conclusions. One was published in December 1993 and the other in March 1994. According to Bissoondath, the polls indicate that Canadians want the diverse ethnic and cultural groups to fit in and become part of "a melting pot" rather than form part of "a mosaic" (1-2).

In his rejection of Canadian multiculturalism, Bissoondath gives the following reasons: (1) Multiculturalism has failed because it has eradicated the centre. He asks: "Who makes a better neighbour - a man of any colour who shares your basic values or a man of any colour who does not? Culture, in its essentials, is about human values, and human values are exclusive to no race" (71). According to him multiculturalism has occasioned "uncertainty as to what and who is a Canadian" (71). (2) Canadian Multiculturalism is an exercise in misrepresentation: it presents a stereotype of the various ethnic groups.

How misleading it is to speak of “the Chinese,” as if no radical differences of experience, of outlook, exist between the people of Hong Kong, so long a British protectorate, the people of authoritarian Taiwan and the people of the brutalized mainland. Only through misrepresentation can a place be made in the mosaic for “the Chinese community” (88).

According to Bissoondath, this type of multiculturalism is concerned more about the exoticism of the various races and cultures rather than about “the positive role that ethnicity - one's racial, cultural and historical backgrounds - can play in creating the fullness of self” (212). (3) Multiculturalism fosters divisiveness. Bissoondath claims that Canadians are already a people afflicted by racism and strong inter-ethnic misunderstanding (88). For him, “ensuring that ethnic groups will preserve their distinctiveness is a gentle and insidious form of cultural apartheid;” it only creates more divisions in an already divided country (90).

Richard Gwyn (1995) takes a position that is similar to that of Bissoondath.

The absurdity here is that almost no one from Italy, say, or Somalia, comes to Canada to be an Italian or a Somali. They come here to be Canadians. As soon as landed, though, their new state in effect tells them that rather than becoming Canadians they must remain Italian-Canadians, and so on (234).

While Gwyn sees those whom he terms as “ethnic politicians” to be relishing this situation, Bissoondath, on the other hand, views the multicultural and multiethnic distinctions to be possibly engineered for the benefit of the dominant groups. Multiculturalism may well be but a divide-and-rule policy to manipulate the populace. Bissoondath puts this argument in the mouth of a cynic (Bissoondath, 1994: 43); but it may not be that far fetched. The term “ethnic” does not generally refer to all Canadians,

though all Canadians are ethnic. The "ethnics" are a special set of Canadians who do not belong to the group of Canadians who are not "ethnic;" and it may well be that the engineers of society love to have it so.

It must be noted that Will Kymlicka (1998) rejects the view of Bissoondath and Gwyn. Kymlicka does not agree that the policy of multiculturalism is fragmenting Canadian society. As far as he is concerned, the evidence points to the contrary. He argues (1) that those groups most directly affected by the policy of multiculturalism have shown the greatest desire to become Canadian. (2) Previous to the adoption of the multiculturalism policy in 1971, what he calls "ethnic groups" were increasingly under-represented in Parliament. Since 1971, the trend has been reversed. (3) Immigrants are highly committed to protecting the country's basic political structure, as evidenced by the 1995 referendum vote. (4) The demand for English and French second language courses is at its highest; multiculturalism is not driving people away from acquiring French and English. (5) There has been a dramatic increase in accepting mixed marriages, and Canadians are much more willing to accept people of "other ethnic groups" as co-workers. Kymlicka claims that all of these integration factors are much better than they are in the United States (Kymlicka, 1998: 18 – 22).

In spite of all his arguments against the effectiveness of official Canadian multiculturalism, Bissoondath does not really reject the concept of the mosaic. He declares: "It is not really a mosaic that one joins - the parts of a mosaic fit neatly together, creating a harmonious whole" (211). He is lamenting the fact that a real mosaic does not exist – this, coming from an ethnic Indian originally from the Caribbean, is worthy of note. Significantly, both Mark Halstead and Neil Bissoondath recognize the need for shared values and both are calling for a new vision. Halstead says:

Unless schools make the effort to articulate their values and develop some clarity of vision, they will not be in a strong position to pursue their task of developing

pupils' understanding of values and helping pupils develop their own commitments (Halstead, 1996 in Halstead & Taylor: 8).

Bissoondath states: "What remains to be decided is whether we have the will, individually and collectively, to summon a new vision" (224).

Bissoondath, at heart, possesses the same commitment as Kymlicka does. He does not reject the principle of multiculturalism, but the official Canadian policy of multiculturalism, which, in his eyes, is concerned more with exoticism than with genuine respect for the positive role ethnicity can play in a true Canadian mosaic. All of this highlights the challenge of determining what values a multicultural society should hold. Should such a society be one in which the majority grants minorities the privilege of celebrating their exotic peculiarities or should a multicultural society seek to be consciously pluralistic – and to create a consensus out of the values of the several cultures within it? This consensus does not have to be all pervasive to the point of determining the course of our personal lives, but simply restricted to the public policies of the nation.

### **1.6 Multiculturalism and Morality: Five Models**

Sharon Welch (1999) in her work *Sweet dreams in America*, considers a number of important issues that could go a long way in helping to realize the new vision for which Bissoondath is calling. Following Christine Sleeter and Carol A. Grant (1994), Welch discusses the topic of multiculturalism from a moral perspective. While Bissoondath criticizes multiculturalism as it exists in Canada, Welch is treating the subject of multicultural education as it ought to exist in the USA:

Multicultural education is one place where people are forging a collective identity in response to our multiple stories, our manifold problems, our various and variegated possibilities of living fairly and well. Sleeter and Grant have identified and analyzed five basic models of multicultural education. Each model of

multicultural education provides a different answer to three basic questions: How just is American society? What is the role of schooling in preparing students to be a part of this society? And what are the differences among children that need to be taken into account in this preparation? (Welch: 72)

Fundamentally, the issue here is: multicultural education for the establishment of a just society. Welch is grappling with the question of moral education within a multicultural context. Perhaps better yet, she is coming to grips with multicultural education for a moral purpose. As James Ryan (1999) observes: "The increasing awareness and legitimacy of diversity in the contemporary world will continue to offer up many challenges for educators. Central among these challenges are issues that revolve around morality and value" (Ryan, 1999 in Begley: 93).

Welch highlights the five models of multicultural education: (1) helping students to fit into the mainstream; (2) teaching students to empathize with and communicate across cultures; (3) raising consciousness through single group studies, and mobilizing people to change the mainstream; (4) celebrating cultural and ethnic diversity; (5) challenging the inequitable distribution of power relations among different groups for the purpose of promoting justice (Welch, 1999: 73) Welch then proceeds give an analysis of the five models.

#### Model 1

Welch states: "The goal of model one, teaching the exceptional and culturally different, is clear cut: assimilation into the mainstream. The political analysis is that American society is basically just and that if people are not successful, it is due to "lack of skills, values, or knowledge" (73). Advocates of this model are of the view that any inequality within the society is not because of the structure of society per se, but rather on

account of "a lack of proper education and socialization." This lack of education and socialization, according to some, is caused by deficiencies in certain groups, while others claim that differences are not necessarily deficiencies. Welch says: "They claim that differences are construed only as weaknesses, and that strengths of different cultural groups are not recognized" (74). Two main reasons are given for rejecting this model: (1) the perceived causes of the inequality are varied. Those who advocate model two contend that "emotional and interpersonal skills are needed as much as skills in English, abstract reasoning, and mathematics." The advocates of models three, four, and five "emphasize the structural barriers to inclusion - racism, sexism, class inequality, and homophobia - that prevent some people from being fully assimilated into the American mainstream" (75). (2) The goal of assimilation is strongly criticized. Those who support models three, four and five further "claim that multicultural education is about changing the mainstream - about learning from other cultures and building with them an inclusive national identity" (75).

## Model 2

Welch points out: "Like those who advocate model one, most advocates of model two believe American society is fundamentally just." Those of this persuasion are of the view that in addition to intellectual skills, disadvantaged persons need to develop the interpersonal skills necessary for democracy. "The goal of model two is to help students recognize the common humanity of all people" (75). Model two addresses itself to all people and cultures within a society - both those of the majority and those comprising smaller groups. It aims to develop a sense of pride in all groups without demeaning any. In this model, though the society is perceived to be fundamentally just, one still

acknowledges that prejudice and bigotry exist. These are seen "as significant barriers to the full implementation of democracy" (76).

Prejudice and bigotry can be challenged by the following pedagogical methods: (1) provide accurate information about people of other groups and cultures; (2) have students of different cultures work together on class projects; (3) provide exercises and assignments that foster empathy between groups: "Literature, role-playing, film simulation games, all help students imagine what it is like to be someone else (77); (4) allow students to work on community projects with people who are objects of bigotry and prejudice; this activity helps students to see the fallacy of their stereotypes; (5) pointing out in the classroom the negative impact incidents like sexual harassment and name-calling can have on people.

Model two is recognized as the most popular method of multicultural education in white elementary schools, but the least employed by those who train in multicultural education. It is said that teachers of multicultural education do not favour this model because it does not tackle the causes of prejudice; that it deals only with the individual and not the social structure, and that "it reduces complex social problems to a simple matter of individuals treating each other with respect" (77). Nevertheless, this model is still acknowledged to be a good method for preparing young students for later exposure to the other forms of multicultural education. To do this model well teachers and students have to acknowledge and value the commonalities and differences of the children in the classroom: "Even a racially homogenous class differs in significant ways - social class, gender, religious traditions, learning styles, interests, relative abilities and disabilities" (78). Like Bissoondath, Welch also warns of the importance of avoiding the tourist approach that focuses only on the exotic aspects of other cultures (78).

### Model 3

This model is seen as having a clear political agenda: with its emphasis on single-group studies it conceives of American society as being unjust and that the proper establishing of democracy requires understanding and correcting that injustice:

Education has not been neutral and has served the interests of the few. Single group studies seek to challenge that exclusivity; they widen the literary canon to include the work of women and people of color, they deepen and expand the history of American society to incorporate the history of all Americans (78).

In addition, this model also can underscore the fact that "oppressed groups are not merely oppressed but are also survivors (and) also creative shapers of culture and society" (79).

### Model 4

This model is a synthesis of model two and the scholarship produced by single group studies. Its goal is to help students understand and respect the history of all the peoples and cultures that make up American society. Welch contends: "Multicultural education redefines literacy, helping white students to learn about African American culture and history, for example, and their impact on African American as well as Euro-American culture" (80). Of course to this may be added the need to understand the story of the Aboriginal peoples from their own perspective.

### Model 5

According to Welch, this model calls for education that is both multicultural and social reconstructionist. She says: "In addition to teaching about forms of social inequality, model five seeks to transform that inequality. This transformation is to take place at three levels: (1) Multicultural and social reconstructionist education transforms the power relations within the school system. (2) Educators evaluate the way the school reflects social inequality in its staffing as well as in its curriculum. They then seek to



remedy that inequality. (3) The concepts of this model are to be passed on to the society at large; and also positive action should be taken to participate in alleviating oppression or rectifying social problems - "writing letters, participating in community service, educating others in the community about the problem" (80). Welch then asserts:

What does it really take to fulfill the goals of model five? My work in model three, single group studies - specifically black studies and women's studies - has made it clear that the barriers to full equality are political, economic, cultural, and psychological. Recognizing that oppression and empowerment includes psychological and sociological factors leads me to a renewed emphasis on model two. We need model two in order to have the strength to see and rectify the injustices disclosed by models three through five (81).

Welch in her discussion of the model two approach to multicultural education raises the question of storytelling as an aspect of the exercise. She states: "Yes, all children need to learn to read. But wouldn't our culture be stronger if we all learned to tell stories? Are there not skills of memorization, of drama, of deep understanding, conveyed by being part of an oral tradition" (75)? Welch argues very strongly for the arts, especially jazz, as providing a model for morality (17 -26).

## 1.7

### Narrative Approach

Sharon Welch's approach is, to large extent, a rejection of the formal, philosophical, cognitive approach to moral education characterized by Kant and Kohlberg (see 1.2), an approach that considers that highest stage of moral reasoning to be that of the categorical imperative executed as universal reversible justice. The narrative approach is a necessary complement to the cognitive approach especially in the context the multicultural nature of pluralistic democracies. Narrative is important as an educational medium and as a means of moral conversation (chaps. 3 & 4). It is an

important means of conveying our values to others and discovering the values of others. Narrative can play an influential part in forging overlapping consensus in pluralistic societies, both in the sphere of education and in public deliberation. This feature of narrative is in line with the concerns Carol Gilligan. Gilligan declares: "While an ethic of justice proceeds from the premise of equality - that everyone should be treated the same - an ethic of care rests on the premise of nonviolence - that no one should be hurt" (Gilligan, 1982: 174).

According to Ronald Morris (1994), Carol Gilligan (1982) proffers "the most penetrating critique of Kohlberg." Morris considers Kohlberg to be overlooking the ethic of care and responsibility - an ethic that figures strongly in the moral concepts of women. While Morris does not completely agree with Gilligan's critique, on the grounds that Gilligan tends to dichotomize the ethic of care and responsibility over against the ethic of justice, Morris does admit however that Gilligan brings an important relational perspective into the debate (Morris, 1994:43). Relational perspectives are best conveyed by narrative. This issue that Gilligan raises is discussed by Helga Kuhse, Peter Singer and Maurice Rickard (1998). Their discussion is a specific response to Gilligan's work (Kuhse et al, 1998: 451 - 463). They state:

While the reasoning associated with the standard, justice-based, ethical views supposedly abstracts from the details of the moral situation to arrive at the salient and universally relevant features, an ethic of care is highly contextual in its approach and takes full account of all the features of the situation (452).

They argue: "Partial moral reasoning is central to the care orientation, involves judgments that emphasize personal relationships and attachments." They further contend: "Impartialist reasoning by contrast, is central to standard moral thinking, and involves judgments and dispositions that are detached and do not favour personal attachments" (453). They maintain that people are likely to make better decisions when they are dealing specifically with their close relations about whom they know a great deal. Such

bonds of affection, caring and special responsibilities reflect "an intuitive level form of moral reasoning, a moral disposition, grounded ultimately in impartialist considerations" (460).

One issue here that needs more consideration, apart from the actual arguments of Kuhse, Singer and Rickard, is the possibility that the apparent tension between partialist and impartialist reasoning may even be less in societies whose ethic is more community-based than individualistic. In spite of this the observations of Mary Warnock (1996) are worthy of note. She insists that even within a pluralistic society it is possible for people to have shared moral values; though in the society at large there may be wide disagreement over the more complex moral issues, within the classroom there is a good measure of consensus on the kind of morality parents expect of children (Warnock, 1996 in Halstead & Taylor, 45-53). Warnock states: "There is a very high degree of moral consensus in the case of what I have designated classroom virtues. Most parents want their children to be taught to behave well in a social situation" (51).

What Warnock is saying may be particularly applicable to the kindergarten level, but we need to pay more attention to Sharon Welch for the moral education of older groups. Actually, Warnock does not really contradict Welch. It is simply that in her short essay she does not go into the methodology of accomplishing her recommendations. Welch, on the other hand, gives us more to work with. The case of the kirpan (see 1.1) is an example of the importance of what Welch is advocating. What is very important here is this: if, as Warnock maintains, there is a high degree of consensus among parents about how they expect their children to behave morally, it follows that there must be at least some measure of moral consensus within the society at large. The challenge therefore would be to discover that moral consensus if it exists and possibly to create it if it does not. It is against this backdrop that John Rawls's idea of an overlapping consensus as a political conception of justice is a principle that can be applied to the sphere of moral education and moral deliberation in pluralistic societies

## Footnotes

1.

In the early part of the twentieth century, in a case where the court in Nova Scotia was considering the aboriginal rights of the Mi'kmaq, the judge stated:

The savages' rights of sovereignty even of ownership were never recognized. Nova Scotia had passed to Great Britain not by gift or purchase from or even by conquest of the Indians but by treaty with France, which had acquired it by priority of discovery and ancient possession; and the Indians passed with it (Cumming & Mickenberg, 1972: 98).

The court determined that the original ownership of the land was that of France "by priority of discovery and ancient possession." The Mi'kmaq (*the savages*), like the flora and fauna, had simply "passed" with the land from France to Britain.

2.

One may now argue that with the advent of George W. Bush, the U. S. may now be under the sway of conservative values.

## CHAPTER 2

### OVERLAPPING CONSENSUS: A POSSIBILITY FOR MORAL EDUCATION AND MORAL DELIBERATION

Overlapping consensus can be used to establish moral principles in pluralistic societies. John Rawls's political idea can be profitably applied to moral decision-making in the political domain and also to the discipline of moral education in schools. Rawls argues that state institutions ought to be guided by a conception of justice that ensures political stability in a pluralistic democratic society. Such a democracy is founded upon the principle of "political liberalism." A politically liberal society is based upon "a political conception of justice" that can "gain the support of an overlapping consensus" of citizens' various comprehensive doctrines (Rawls, 1996: 11-15).

#### 2.1 **Rawls's Political Conception of Justice Clarified**

Rawls enunciates two conceptions of justice; the first is a general conception that we may place under the broad classification of comprehensive liberalism. Rawls states: "My aim is to present a conception of justice which generalizes and carries to a higher level of abstraction the familiar theory of the social contract as found, say, in Locke, Rousseau, and Kant (Rawls, 1999a: 10). The second is a political conception of justice that, according to Rawls, is different from a comprehensive or general conception of justice that is based upon a comprehensive doctrine. Rawls explains:

It is comprehensive when it includes conceptions of what is of value in human life, and ideals of personal character, as well as ideals of friendship and of familial and associational relationships, and much else that is to inform our conduct, and in the limit to our life as a whole (Rawls, 1996: 13).

Eamonn Callan contends that a doctrine is fully comprehensive “if it claims to organize all relevant values into a systematic whole” (Callan,1996:6). For Rawls, “a conception is said to be general when it applies to a wide range of subjects (in the limit to all subjects); it is comprehensive when it includes conceptions of what is of value in human life, as well of ideals of personal virtue and character, that are to inform much of our nonpolitical conduct (in the limit of our life as a whole)” (Rawls: 1996: 175). Rawls points out that religious and philosophical conceptions are usually general or fully comprehensive. According to him, “a doctrine is fully comprehensive when it covers all recognized values and virtues within one rather precisely articulated scheme of thought; whereas a doctrine is only partially comprehensive when it comprises certain (but not all) nonpolitical values and virtues and is rather loosely articulated” (175). In order for a doctrine to be even partially comprehensive it must extend beyond political values and include values that are nonpolitical. An example of a comprehensive doctrine is the concept of “inalienable rights” as it appears in the U.S. Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”(The Declaration of Independence). The “unalienable rights” that all humans are said to possess encompass a wider scope than the merely political – represented by “liberty” - they also include life and the pursuit of happiness; furthermore, the declaration states that all men are created equal. These concepts in the independence declaration are comprehensive philosophical doctrines and as such they lie in the sphere of comprehensive liberalism. Another example of a comprehensive doctrine is the statement of St. Paul the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 10: 31:

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (Stamps, 1990: 344,345). In this case, the glory of God is the chief good. This is a doctrine that seeks to direct all of life, or at least a large portion of it. It is a comprehensive religious doctrine.

Rawls affirms that the principles of the general conception of justice based upon a comprehensive doctrine “provide a way of assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society” (Rawls, 1999a: 4). The basic institutions of society, for Rawls, include things such as freedom of thought, liberty of conscience, competitive markets, and private property in the means of production and the monogamous family. The principles of justice also “define the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation” (4). The burdens of social cooperation are the limitations to their freedom and privileges individuals are to be willing to bear for the sake of cooperating with others (4). Rawls points out:

They are the principles that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamental terms of their association. These principles are to regulate all further agreements; they specify the kinds of social cooperation that can be entered into and forms of government that can be established. This way of regarding the principles of justice I shall call justice as fairness (Rawls, 1999a: 10).<sup>1</sup>

For Rawls, “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is to systems of thought” (1999a:3). He points out that his conception of justice is general in scope. He informs us:

An essential feature of a well ordered society associated with justice as fairness is that all its citizens endorse this conception on the basis of what I now call a comprehensive philosophical doctrine...Although the distinction between a political conception of justice and a comprehensive philosophical doctrine is not discussed in *Theory*, once the question is raised, it is clear, I think, that the text regards justice as fairness and utilitarianism as comprehensive, or partially comprehensive doctrines (Rawls, 1996: xviii).

This conception of justice as a comprehensive or partially comprehensive, liberal doctrine marks the fundamental difference from the way Rawls later presents his conception of justice as a political, liberal doctrine. The two concepts of justice are instances of the distinction Rawls makes between comprehensive liberalism and political liberalism.

According to Rawls, a political conception of justice is a moral conception worked out specifically for political, social and economic institutions (Rawls, 1996: 11):

In this respect a political conception of justice differs from many moral doctrines, for these are widely regarded as general and comprehensive views. Utilitarianism is a familiar example: the principle of utility, however understood, is usually said to hold for all kinds of subjects ranging from the conduct of individuals and personal relations to the organization of society as a whole as well as to the law of peoples. By contrast, a political conception tries to elaborate a reasonable conception for the basic structure alone and involves so far as possible, no wider commitment to any other doctrine (Rawls, 1996: 13).

For Rawls, this makes the political conception “a freestanding view.” Rawls’s political conception is designed to establish a just society in the midst of the varying



comprehensive doctrines to which people subscribe. It is not set forth as a conception that is derived from any comprehensive doctrine. While one may appeal to a comprehensive doctrine to justify the political conception, the political conception of justice itself is not derived from any comprehensive doctrine (Rawls, 1996: 12). Rawls discusses this very question:

Briefly, the idea is that in a constitutional democracy the public conception of justice should be, so far as possible, independent of controversial philosophical and religious doctrines. Thus to formulate such a conception, we apply the principle of toleration to philosophy itself: the public conception of justice is to be political, not metaphysical. Hence the title (Rawls, 1985:223).

Amy Gutmann further explains this conception of political liberalism:

Political liberalism, so understood, is contrasted to comprehensive liberalism, which, as the name suggests, is a comprehensive moral doctrine. Comprehensive liberalism offers not only political principles but also a conception of the good life, typically as a life of individuality or autonomy, which complements its political principles (Gutmann, 1995: 558).

I may not agree with Rawls's view of the non-comprehensive nature of political liberalism (see 2.5), however, I still contend that its *modus operandi* is a valuable model for establishing moral principles in a pluralistic society. While Rawls is concerned about how we establish a politically just society for all in a democracy characterized by a plurality of comprehensive doctrines, I am concerned about how we establish and teach moral principles in such a society. The *modus operandi* of political liberalism is important because it is a system of political jurisprudence that is designed for the

development of political consensus in pluralistic societies. This is relevant for our discussion of moral development in pluralistic democracies. We need to develop a method of establishing moral principles and also conducting moral education in societies that are pluralistic. Rawls's approach to the development of political consensus can be applied to the challenge of developing moral consensus.

Designed for a democracy, a political conception of justice is based upon a tradition of democracy. According to Rawls, it involves a society that is a fair system of cooperation from one generation to the next. Such a society is comprised of persons who persons are free and equal and have a sense of justice have the capacity to cooperate fully in a democracy. (Rawls, 1996: 18-19). These persons are free and equal and have a sense of justice and a conception of the good (Rawls, 1996: 34). All of this is worked out from the grounding of what Rawls calls "the original position." This forms the foundation upon which the political conception is constructed (Rawls, 1996: 22, 23).

Rawls states:

In justice as fairness the original position of equality corresponds to the state of nature in the traditional theory of the social contract. This original position is not, of course, thought of as an actual historical state of affairs, much less as a primitive condition of culture. It is understood as a purely hypothetical situation characterized so as to lead to a certain conception of justice (Rawls, 1999a: 11).

According to Rawls, in this situation no one knows anything of one's class, social status, level of intelligence, strengths, weaknesses, or economic position. One does not even know one's conception of the good. Rawls calls this imaginary outlook "the veil of ignorance." This is to ensure that all are treated equally by the principles that are worked

out in the political conception of justice; for what we construct under the veil of ignorance, would be fair to all. Whatever principles we establish would be applied to ourselves. For Rawls, such a political conception of justice is to function in a well ordered society. Rawls identifies three important features of a well-ordered society. (1) Such a society is one in which “everyone accepts, and knows that everyone else accepts, the very same principles of justice;” (2) it is a society of which “its main political and social institutions and how they fit together as one system of cooperation is publicly known, or with good reason believed, to satisfy these principles; (3) it is a society whose “citizens have a normally effective sense of justice and so they generally comply with society’s basic institutions, which they regard as just.” Rawls continues: “In such a society the publicly recognized conception of justice establishes a shared point of view from which citizens’ claims on society can be adjudicated” (Rawls, 1996: 35). A well-ordered society is the ideal of a peaceful functioning democracy in which the citizens live in a milieu of transparent justice. A society can only be well ordered where opposing but reasonable comprehensive doctrines can find an overlapping consensus. If there is no consensus, then concepts of justice in the public sphere – the legal principles that people are to follow in the functioning of society - will have to be established by coercion. Coercion is generally the method of achieving order when societies are governed by a utopian ideal based upon a comprehensive doctrine that may not be shared by others living within that society. Thomas Nagel (1991) puts it very delicately when he says: “The danger of utopianism comes from the political tendency, in pursuit of the ideal of moral equality, to put too much pressure on individual motives or even to attempt to transcend them entirely through an impersonal transformation of social individuals” (24).

It is the kind of threat of which many democracies are afraid. Unlike unreasonable comprehensive doctrines, reasonable comprehensive doctrines “do not impose the unrealistic – indeed, the utopian – requirement that all citizens affirm the same comprehensive doctrine, but only, as in political liberalism, the same public conception of justice” (Rawls, 1996: 39). According to Rawls then, this political conception is to be focus of an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines. Rawls asserts: “Political liberalism looks for a political conception of justice that we hope can gain the support of an overlapping consensus of reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines in a society regulated by it” (Rawls, 1996: 10).

## **2.2 Overlapping Consensus**

Rawls maintains that another basic idea of political liberalism that goes with "the political conception of justice" is "the idea of an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines" (Rawls, 1996: 134). Rawls argues that “in such a consensus, the reasonable comprehensive doctrines endorse the political conception” of justice as fairness “each from its own point of view” (Rawls, 1996: 134). Citizens are called upon to establish public policies through an overlapping consensus of the various comprehensive doctrines based upon the fact that they already accept the constitutional principles of their democracy. The constitutional principles – the political conception – form the focal point to which citizens appeal in order to arrive at a consensus for the formation of public policies. A well-ordered society is best established upon consensus especially where the society is pluralistic in nature. This idea of an overlapping consensus is the feature of Rawls’s theory that is applicable to the field of moral education. It is an idea that provides for the cooperation of persons and groups of divergent comprehensive

doctrines. Just as in the case of public policy in the political domain, the content of moral education in the public sphere can be based upon an overlapping consensus of comprehensive doctrines with its focus upon the constitution. The constitution is both a political and a moral document. It deals both with political structures and with moral principles – the political structure of a democratic society on the one hand, and the rights and freedoms of citizens of a democratic society on the other hand. Rawls argues for the establishment of *a political conception of justice* based upon an overlapping consensus of comprehensive doctrines. I am arguing for the establishment of *moral principles* in a pluralistic society on the same basis.

Reasonableness, a complement to rationality

It is really important for Rawls that an overlapping consensus is to be found among reasonable rather than merely rational comprehensive doctrines. Reasonableness requires, according to Rawls, that as rational agents citizens must have no superior bargaining advantages over one another. Reasonableness establishes and adheres to fair terms of cooperation in the public sphere that all citizens are willing to accept (Rawls, 1996: 52-54). This is important for Rawls in that it provides a relatively peaceful and workable arrangement by which citizens implement policies with respect for one another's points of view. This is the kind of approach that is also important for the development of moral education where citizens of varying comprehensive doctrines come sharply into focus. In the sphere of moral education we need to advocate the importance of reasonableness in decision-making and not merely rationality in debating.

Rawls takes time to differentiate the reasonable from the rational. According to Rawls, the rational is an idea by which a person “with powers of judgement and

deliberation,” seeks “ends and interests peculiarly its own.” Consequently, unreasonable people can be quite rational in that their judgements can be logically consistent with their purely self interested premises. Reasonable people can also be rational; but the difference is that reasonable people would argue from a premise in which they consider the consequences of their actions on the well being of others (Rawls, 1996: 49). For Rawls, the reasonable is an aspect of society as a system of fair cooperation that all accept and in which reciprocity is the principal idea. Reasonable people accept that reciprocity enables all to benefit fairly (Rawls, 1996: 16-17). In the thought of Rawls, the reasonable and the rational are understood as two distinct and independent ideas.

However, they are seen to be complementary aspects of the idea of fair cooperation:

As complementary ideas, neither the reasonable nor the rational can stand without the other. Merely reasonable agents would have no ends of their own they wanted to advance by fair cooperation; merely rational agents lack a sense of justice and fail to recognize the independent validity of the claims of others (Rawls, 1996: 52).

Rawls contends that the reasonable is public in a way that the rational is not. The reasonable is neither altruistic nor self-centred. Two fundamental features of the reasonable are (i) the willingness to live by fair terms of cooperation and (ii) the willingness to recognize the burdens of judgement and to accept their consequences for the use of public reason in the democratic process. Disagreement does occur among reasonable people. The sources or causes of these disagreements are the burdens of judgement. The burdens of judgement require us to assess the strengths of other people's claims. They also require us to determine whether our belief systems and schemes of

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thought are as considerate of others' claims as we would wish them to be considerate of ours. Reasonable people are those who are willing to consider the claims of others on a basis of fairness (Rawls, 1996: 55-56). For example, reasonable citizens will not require that their particular religion be recognized as the official state religion or be granted privileges that other faith groups do not have. Whatever they desire for themselves they will desire for others. Rawls maintains:

As reasonable and rational we have to make different kinds of judgements. As rational we have to balance our various ends and estimate their appropriate place in our way of life; and doing this confronts us with grave difficulties in making correct judgements of rationality. On the other hand, as reasonable we must assess the strength of other people's claims, not only against our claims but against one another (Rawls, 1996: 56).

Because of this, just people subscribe to reasonable comprehensive doctrines. Yet reasonable people do not all affirm the same comprehensive doctrines, and they will avoid using force to repress comprehensive doctrines that are not unreasonable though different from their own. Reasonable persons realize that there is a limit as to what can be reasonably justified to others; consequently they endorse the same form of liberty of conscience and freedom for others as they do for themselves (Rawls, 1996: 60-61). So then the fair terms of cooperation should exist in a milieu of full publicity. In this way the decision making process is open to public scrutiny, public participation, and public justification (Rawls, 1996: 66-71). The overlapping consensus for political purposes is to be constructed, according to Rawls, through the use of public reason. In the moral sphere the same process can be employed.

## Skills of Public Reason

According to Rawls, the formation of consensus is best achieved when citizens understand how to employ the skills of public reason. Rawls contends that citizens have two views: a comprehensive one and a political one. Their comprehensive view is based upon their philosophical, religious or moral worldview; their political view is based upon the necessity of cooperating in public life with others who may not share their worldview. According to Rawls, a political conception that is fair aims at a public basis for the justification of civic ideals and at the practice of public reason that, “so far as possible” is independent of comprehensive religious, philosophical and moral doctrines (Rawls, 1996:144).). This public reason is made up of ideas shared with the public political culture. Public reason, according to Rawls, can be conducted in two ways: by means of either the “exclusive” approach, or by the “inclusive” approach (Rawls, 1996: 247).

Rawls’s first position – the exclusive approach - obtains when citizens avoid the use of comprehensive doctrines for the justification of political ideas or political judgements, so that the deepest controversies are avoided and the basis for a stable overlapping consensus can be uncovered (Rawls, 1996: 247-252). Rawls states: “A political conception is at best but a guiding framework of deliberation and reflection, which helps us reach political agreement on at least the constitutional essentials and the basic questions of justice” (Rawls, 1996:156). Rawls maintains that reasonable comprehensive doctrines can find such a political agreement because it is easier to accomplish agreement in the arena of political values than in the religious, philosophical or moral arena. If consensus is found in the political domain, then “severe conflicts with other values are much reduced,” because “when an overlapping consensus supports the



political conception, this conception is not viewed as incompatible with basic religious, philosophical and moral values” (Rawls, 1996: 157). The political conception is compatible with citizens’ basic values because their comprehensive doctrines are reasonable. For Rawls, reasonable comprehensive doctrines are doctrines that can be justified in the public domain – the domain of public reason. When one seeks to justify one’s doctrine in this manner, certain rules are to be followed if the political principle of justice as fairness is to be respected. These are the principles of public reason. Public reason is the reason of a democratic people sharing equal citizenship. This reason concerns the public good (Rawls, 1996: 213). From time to time, within a democracy, citizens as a collective body pass laws and amend their constitution. This requires a willingness to listen to others, to be fair-minded, and very importantly for Rawls it requires that citizens speak in terms that all can accept. Yet Rawls insists that public reason is not a mere *modus vivendi* based upon political compromise. In a *modus vivendi* citizens remain closed and locked into their own comprehensive doctrines and simply coexist together in society. On the contrary, in Rawls’s scheme, all speak from the basis of their own reasonable comprehensive doctrines as they seek to develop a workable political consensus that can be publicly justified by appeals to the political instrument, the constitution. However, these comprehensive doctrines ought not to be presented as part of the public deliberation or even used as a basis for voting (Rawls, 1996: 213-218).

According to Rawls, the subject matter of public reason ought to be issues relating to the following: basic rights, liberties and opportunities. These rights are to be prioritized. Rawls also includes the basic structure of government and the political apparatus into the scope of public discussion: the executive, the legislature, the judiciary and the extent of

majority rule. For Rawls, “the general structure of government” on the one hand and “the basic rights and liberties of citizenship” on the other are both aspects of the constitutional essentials that necessitate the practice of public reason based upon a political conception of justice that comprises the following: (i) it is founded upon the basic structure of society that is a unified scheme of social cooperation; (ii) it is independent of comprehensive doctrines; (iii) it is expressed within the scope of the fundamental political ideals of the public culture of democracy; (iv) fundamental political ideals are based on constitutional essentials of basic social justice and a social minimum covering citizens’ basic needs as a priority over social inequalities (Rawls, 1996: 223-230). Rawls asserts:

The point of the ideal of public reason is that citizens are to conduct their fundamental discussions within the framework of what each regards as a political conception of justice based on values that the others can reasonably be expected to endorse and each is, in good faith, prepared to defend that conception so understood (Rawls, 1996:226).

In other words, when people are discussing issues in the public arena, they should only use language and justifiable grounds that are acceptable by all. For example, a biblical theologian may base his belief in the equality of all citizens upon the doctrine that human beings are made in God’s image and likeness. A philosopher, on the other hand, may base his belief in the equality of all citizens upon intuition. In the Rawlsian scheme of things, in the public domain, according to the exclusive view of public reason, discussions and deliberations regarding the equality of all citizens should be based upon the principles of the constitution without any reference to any comprehensive religious,

moral or philosophical doctrines. This is the distinctive feature of the exclusive view of public reason. When we are seeking to establish principles of justice with their extension to public policy, deliberation in the public sphere is to be conducted without any appeal to our comprehensive doctrines.

This is not the only position Rawls holds concerning public reason. Rawls makes a strong argument for a process of public reasoning that is independent of comprehensive doctrines (the exclusive view) then he back-pedals and concedes that the use of comprehensive doctrines (the inclusive view) is valid under certain circumstances, and seems even better (Rawls, 1996: 247-248). Charles Kelbey (1996) recognizes this:

The exclusive view of public reason requires that we exclude reasons (for or against a fundamental political position) whenever those reasons are framed in terms of comprehensive doctrines. The inclusive view, however, permits citizens to draw upon their comprehensive doctrines, as regards the foundations of political values, if they can do so in ways that reinforce the very ideal of public reason. Rawls argues that the inclusive view seems the correct one, for it allows more flexibility in furthering the ideal of public reason depending on varying social and political conditions (Kelbey, 1996: 104).

Concerning this, Rawls himself asserts:

The public reasons such a doctrine supports may, of course, be given but not the supporting doctrine itself. Call this understanding of public reason the “exclusive view.” But as against the exclusive view, there is another view allowing citizens, in certain situations, to present what they regard as the basis of political values rooted in their comprehensive doctrine, provided they do this in ways that

strengthen the ideal of public reason itself. This understanding of public reason we may call the “inclusive view” (Rawls, 1996: 247-248).

And he continues:

The question then is whether we should understand the ideal of public reason in accordance with the exclusive view or the inclusive view. The answer turns on which view best encourages citizens to honor the ideal of public reason and secures its social conditions in the longer run in a well-ordered society. Accepting this, the inclusive view seems the correct one.

While up to a point, Rawls argues strongly for the exclusive view, he then concedes that the inclusive view seems better. In a footnote, he admits that he did not originally hold this dual position:

I am greatly indebted to Amy Gutmann and Lawrence Solum for discussion and correspondence about these limits. At first I inclined to what I call the “exclusive view;” they persuaded me that this was too restrictive, as the examples of the abolitionists (which is Solum’s) and of Martin Luther King, Jr., bring out. I have not begun to cover the complexities of this question as shown in their correspondence (Rawls, 1996: 247).

Rawls’s position concerning the inclusive view is not as carefully worked out as his position on the exclusive view. Observe that Rawls’s argument is based upon the notion that “the view which best encourages citizens to honor the ideal of public reason and secures its social conditions” is the one to be followed. Of course, Rawls does stipulate that it is “in certain situations” citizens may be allowed to present their arguments together with their comprehensive doctrines. However, the fact remains that Rawls sees

it necessary to admit comprehensive doctrines into the arena of public speech. He justifies this approach in the following way:

For under different political and social conditions with different families of doctrine and practice, the ideal must surely be advanced and fulfilled in different ways, sometimes by what may look like the exclusive view, at others by what may look like the inclusive view. Those conditions determine, then, how the ideal is best attained, either in the short or longer run. The inclusive view allows for this variation and is more flexible as needed to further the ideal of public reason (Rawls, 1996:248).

Though Rawls does not intend it, he sees the need to admit comprehensive doctrines into the arena of public reason under certain conditions that may further the ideal of public reason. When Rawls says that the “inclusive view” *seems* better, he may be saying more than is generally realized or that he himself realizes: He virtually moves into the position of *recommending* the inclusive view.

### **2.3 Conversation and Consensus**

Kenneth Strike (1994), in his discussion of this same topic of public reason, argues for “pragmatic liberalism” as the philosophical basis for the construction of public speech in a pluralistic society. He discusses the use of comprehensive doctrines in the public sphere, and he contrasts “pragmatic liberalism” against “grounded liberalism.” According to him, grounded liberalism is based upon some comprehensive doctrine: for example, the idea that all human beings as persons are of equal value and that other distinctions such as ethnicity, religion or culture are inconsequential. Strike sees such a view as being potentially oppressive to those who may be of a different perspective; a

universal vision in the civic domain will generally make those who disagree become second class citizens (Strike, 1994: 13 – 16). This is the kind of situation one does not want in a democratic society. If we use the same example mentioned, pragmatic liberalism would respect not only the equality of all human beings, but would also recognize that people conceive of themselves in diverse contexts. Each of these contexts is to be respected if a pluralistic society is to exist. The aim ought to be to search for overlapping consensus within the several worldviews of a pluralistic society. According to Strike, in the working out of such a consensus, the real justification of the position borne out by the consensus should be private and particular rather than public and universal. In the public domain its philosophical position does not have to be strong, for “what is sought is pragmatic consensus, not rational dominance. It regards the search for a shared civic tongue, more as a negotiation than as the pursuit of some political truth” (Strike, 1994: 13). Strike is seeking to develop principles that individuals and groups in a pluralistic society can use as guidelines for conducting public conversation and debate in the political domain. Strike, like Rawls, is willing to admit comprehensive doctrines into the public domain, but specifies that the public justification of the use of these comprehensive doctrines should be weak, as opposed to the private justification of the political consensus that may be strong (Strike, 1994: 13 – 16). Such an approach shows sensitivity to those who may not share our comprehensive doctrines; yet at the same time it enables us to be honest with ourselves: it allows us rational integrity and simultaneously shows reasonableness to others.

Strike’s recommendations make a very important contribution to the way in which Rawls’s idea of public reason can be exercised. What is significant here is this: Rawls

admits and even recommends that the inclusive view of public reason is the preferred approach to arriving at an overlapping consensus. Rawls contends that comprehensive doctrines may be used in public as long as they are not imposed upon others: “In each case, which doctrine is affirmed is a matter of conscience for the individual citizen” (Rawls, 1996: 243).

Kent Greenawalt (1995) gives a very provocative interpretation of Rawls’s idea of public reason. His interpretation is that in situations where the followers of various comprehensive doctrines are fearful of and distrustful towards one another, the exclusive approach to public discourse is to be preferred: “That is a strong reason to settle on a political culture of common reason, at least for essentials.” On the other hand, if people hold a variety of comprehensive doctrines but share a sense of mutual respect and trust within their society; and are aspiring to learn from one another, then the inclusive approach with its use of private comprehensive doctrines would not be threatening (Greenawalt, 1995: 120). Here, one does get the impression that Greenawalt has explained Rawls’s position better than Rawls himself. The Strike-Greenawalt approach to the exercise of Rawls’s public reason in the political sphere augurs well for application to the establishment of moral principles in a pluralistic society. Their contribution lays down very valuable guidelines as to how we can order public conversation and pursue consensus in a society criss-crossed by a diversity of comprehensive doctrines.

## **2.4 Political Liberation and Its Justification**

Another aspect of Rawls’s theory that augurs well for application to the moral sphere is the fact that Rawls’s theory is not as free of comprehensive doctrines as he imagines. If this is really so, it demonstrates that a theory based upon comprehensive

doctrines still provides for a playing field that is aware of other varying comprehensive doctrines. Jurgen Habermas (1995) has criticized Rawls for his maintaining that his theory is devoid of philosophical truth claims. Habermas is no doubt working with Rawls's 1993 edition of *Political liberalism*. Rawls's position on this, however, does not change with his 1996 edition. Habermas contends: "He seems to want to purchase the neutrality of his conception of justice at the cost of forsaking its cognitive validity" (Habermas, 1995: 110). According to Habermas, Rawls needs to establish his theory upon epistemic foundations in order to give it validity. Habermas further declares:

The theory itself must furnish the premises "that we and others recognize as true, or as reasonable for the purpose of reaching a working agreement on the fundamentals of political justice." But if Rawls rules out a functionalist interpretation of justice as fairness, he must allow some epistemic relation between the validity of his theory and the prospect of its neutrality toward competing worldviews being confirmed in public discourses (Habermas, 1995: 122).

Here Habermas is referring to Rawls's article on overlapping consensus in *The Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* (Rawls, 1987: 6). Habermas sensitive to the fact that Rawls is aware that comprehensive doctrines advocate truth claims, but that Rawls still argues that the Rawlsian theory does not. He calls Rawls into question for appealing to us to accept his theory as being reasonable without demonstrating to us the epistemic foundations of the reasonable. In other words, he has replaced the 'true' with the 'reasonable' without laying a clear, credible foundation for doing so:

For me, the problem is not Rawls's rejection of moral realism or the consequent



rejection of a semantic truth predicate for normative statements but the fact that he does attach such a truth predicate to worldviews (comprehensive doctrines). He thereby precludes the possibility of exploiting the epistemic connotations of the term 'reasonable,' connotations that he must nevertheless attribute to his own conception of justice if this is to lay claim to some sort of normative binding force<sup>2</sup> (Habermas, 1995: 124).

Rawls's response to this is pretty straightforward, but rather weak:

I have nothing to add to what has been said already. Political liberalism does not use the concept of moral truth applied to its own political (always moral) judgements. Here it says that political judgements are always reasonable or unreasonable; and it lays out political ideals, principles, and standards as criteria of the reasonable (Rawls, 1996: 394).

## **2.5 Rawls's Comprehensive Foundations**

In spite of what Rawls believes and maintains about his theory, what is very thought-provoking is the fact that Rawls is advocating a political conception of justice that is grounded upon philosophical, comprehensive doctrines. This provides us with another important model for application to moral decision-making and moral education. If political liberalism, a theory designed for pluralistic societies, is based upon comprehensive doctrines, then its principles ought to be able to be applied to the moral arena of pluralistic societies. David Lewis Schaefer (1996) also argues that Rawls's theory points to comprehensive underpinnings:

If "the struggle for reflective equilibrium continues indefinitely," what security after all do Rawls principles of justice provide for what are treated in the

Declaration of Independence as inalienable human rights, grounded in “the laws of nature and of nature’s God” (Schaefer, 1996: 166)?

Schaefer contends that Rawls is willing to set aside the issue of the relation of justice to the overall natural order so that he may secure people’s agreement on a particular view of it (Schaefer, 1996:181). Schaefer continues:

Rawls insists that the ideas out of which a “political conception” of justice is to be built must be derived solely from the “public political culture,” not the “non-public” one (43,220-221); but how this distinction is to be maintained - that is, how one can ensure that what Rawls identifies as “political” ideas in his sense have not already been “infected,” so to speak, by “non-political” ones - is nowhere explained (Schaefer, 1996:167).

Schaefer’s perception of an ‘infection,’ has been diagnosed by Amy Gutmann and Eamonn Callan.

Amy Gutmann (1995) contends that Rawls’s political liberalism is not as distinct from comprehensive liberalism as Rawls imagines. Gutmann argues that the principle of mutual respect is a fundamental tenet of both comprehensive liberals and political liberals; consequently their particular views make little difference in the practice of civic education (560-561). Gutmann, though, still has a more perceptive observation: that autonomy and individuality – two basic doctrines of comprehensive liberalism - play important roles in political liberalism. Gutmann states:

The political virtues of mutual respect and deliberation are even more demanding than toleration and have even greater spillover effects outside the political realm.

The spillovers are unintended by political liberalism, but it is not a coincidence that the political skills and virtues of liberal democracy resemble the personal skills of a self-directing or autonomous life (Gutmann, 1995: 576).

Eamonn Callan (1997) is much more forthright than Gutmann. Callan declares: “The distinction between political liberalism and comprehensive liberalism is far more porous than its devotees suppose, and Rawls’s political liberalism in particular is really a disguised instance of comprehensive liberalism” (Callan, 1997: 13). Callan maintains that the political virtues that bring about the terms of fairness and cooperation for the implementation of Rawls’s project “bring autonomy through the back door of political liberalism” (40). Callan argues that the disciplines of critical reflection and independent decision making, the questioning of traditional authority are all indicative of the ideal of “ethical autonomy.” He concludes:

The journey from comprehensive to political liberalism turns out to be a matter of running very hard to find oneself in more or less the same place...Rawls offers a distinctive and powerful argument for a partially comprehensive doctrine of ethical autonomy that derives not from speculative metaphysics or contestable intuitions about value but from a principle of reciprocity and a shared recognition of the limits of the reason we must employ with each other when we try to live by that principle (Callan, 1997: 41-42).

It is to be noted that Rawls does recognize the role of autonomy in the outworking of his theory, but he attempts to make a distinction between political autonomy and ethical autonomy:

This full autonomy of political life must be distinguished from the ethical values of autonomy and individuality, which may apply to the whole of life, both social and individual, as expressed by the comprehensive liberalism of both Kant and Mill. Justice as fairness emphasizes this contrast: it affirms political autonomy for all but leaves the weight of ethical autonomy to be decided by citizens severally in the light of their comprehensive doctrines (Rawls, 1996: 78)

Rawls seems to fail to recognize that his call for political autonomy is a moral call. It is a call to exercise moral judgement in the political arena. It is a call to exercise the principles of ethical autonomy in the political sphere. The appeal to treat others with respect, to recognize others as equals and having the same rights as ourselves even though their views may be different from ours, is a moral call. Consequently, political liberalism is more attached to the comprehensive doctrine of ethical liberalism than Rawls dares to admit. In short, political liberalism is simply a political expression of comprehensive liberalism. Rob Reich (2002), in his evaluation of Rawls on this point, states: "Liberalism must plan for autonomy – it is an aim, not a mere side effect – and it is hard to see how autonomy could be neutrally justified. Autonomy and the political virtues do not leave comprehensive doctrines "untouched;" autonomy is not culturally neutral" (48). He continues: "Ultimately, Rawls's distinction between political and moral autonomy fails, for autonomy...is less a capacity that we can switch on and off at will than a sort of character that colors our lives as a whole" (49).

Also the matter of Rawls's view of "justice as fairness" raises other questions. Is not this a truth claim? Is not Rawls seeking to establish justice without truth, yet at the same time saying that fairness is the true yard stick by which justice is to be measured? Is

he not also saying that reciprocity is to be the important partially comprehensive doctrine upon which political liberalism must rest? It is clear; political liberalism is firmly grounded upon the principles of modern democracy with reciprocity as an important basis. For example Rawls declares:

When political liberalism speaks of a reasonable overlapping consensus of comprehensive doctrines, it means that all of these doctrines, both religious and nonreligious, support a political conception of justice underwriting a constitutional democratic society whose principles, ideals, and standards satisfy the criterion of reciprocity (Rawls, 1999b in Freeman: 608).

In *Lectures on the history of moral philosophy*, Rawls discusses the difference between the ancients and the moderns in their approach to moral philosophy. Rawls states:

The ancients asked about the most rational way to true happiness, or highest good, and they inquired about how virtuous conduct and the virtues as aspects of character – the virtues of courage and temperance, wisdom and justice, which are themselves good – are related to that highest good, whether as means, or as constituents, or both. Whereas the moderns asked primarily, or at least in the first instance, about what they saw as authoritative prescriptions of right reason, and the rights, duties, and obligations to which these prescriptions of reason gave rise (Rawls, 2000: 2).

Rawls's theory of political liberalism is obviously intended to be in the modernist camp. The principles of public reason, the rights and responsibilities of citizens of a politically liberal society are all instances of this modernist approach. It must be noted, however, that "authoritative prescriptions of right reason" must have a source of authority; and for

Rawls, that source of authority is reciprocity and democracy. In the light of this we can ask the question: how can political liberalism be founded upon the culture of a democracy and still ignore the philosophical, moral and religious truth claims out of which modern democracy developed? As David Schaefer hints at, one can demonstrate that the concept of democracy, as Rawls understands it, has historical roots in comprehensive doctrines, and that he is unable to extricate himself from the grasp of comprehensive doctrines. Once we can demonstrate this, Rawls's political liberalism is no longer "a free standing view," but simply a political view that denies its comprehensive origins. Rawls is cutting democracy away from the very foundations upon which it is established. Indeed it may even be argued that the concept of democracy itself is the product of an overlapping consensus of comprehensive philosophical, religious and moral doctrines.

## **2.6 Abolitionist Consensus in Britain: Philosophical and Religious Arguments**

Two powerful historical movements that exemplify the occurrence of an overlapping consensus are the 19<sup>th</sup> century antislavery movement and the 20<sup>th</sup> century civil rights movement. Both these movements were grounded in comprehensive religious doctrines, which were used in the public domain (Rawls, 1996: 249-251). As we noted already, Rawls confesses that the Abolition and the Civil Rights movements influenced him in being willing to admit comprehensive doctrines into public speech. Rawls is dealing with the U.S. experience, but a similar situation existed in Britain.

In the antislavery movement of Britain comprehensive philosophical and religious doctrines overlapped and created a consensus that played an important part in the campaign for the abolition of slavery. Judith Jennings (1997) observes that William Wilberforce (1759 -1833), one of the main abolitionists in the British House of

Commons, took note of the fact that the antislavery position was held by people of varying philosophical and religious stripes. Jennings refers to a parliamentary speech delivered by Wilberforce in 1792: “Wilberforce paid tribute to the diverse coalition supporting abolition by saying that ‘men who differed on many speculative points and most political topics seemed to think alike’ on the slave trade” (Jennings, 1997: 71). In a previous speech to parliament Wilberforce had also stated that a society had been established for the abolition of the slave trade in which Dissenters, Quakers and Churchmen had united. He called on parliament to abide by the principles of natural justice and abolish the slave trade (Jennings, 1997: 55).

One prominent philosopher who censures the practice of slavery is Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755). Montesquieu contends that slavery is contrary to nature and to the fundamental principle of all societies (Montesquieu, [1748] 1949: 237). He declares: “But as all men are born equal, slavery must be accounted unnatural” (Montesquieu, [1748] 1949: 240). He bases his argument against slavery upon the comprehensive doctrine of the equality of all human beings. Since equality is the natural condition of all humans, then slavery is an abnormality.

Another major spokesperson against slavery is the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Roger Anstey (1975) identifies Rousseau as an eminent philosophical influence on the abolitionist movement:

It was Rousseau who made the most fundamental attack on slavery. Conceived as a part of his radical attack on the injustices of the existing social order as a whole he repeated Montesquieu’s arguments against the validity of self-sale and of the

enslavement of captives, but also went beyond them. Men were born free and equal and so slavery could only stand condemned (Anstey, 1975: 120).

Actually, the abolitionists themselves recognized the contributions both of Montesquieu and Rousseau. In the anonymous nineteenth century work, *The negro's memorial or abolitionist's catechism*, a list of several abolitionist writers appears; then the author states: "To these may be added, Rousseau and Baron Montesquieu, celebrated French writers" (An Abolitionist 1825, 8). Rousseau's rejection of the institution of slavery is based upon his concept of liberty as an inalienable right. It is a right from which no human could alienate himself or any other human. Rousseau argues that no individual has a natural authority over another. Liberty, for Rousseau, is the natural state of the human being. His quest in *The social contract* is to discover how humans can be a part of society and still be free: "The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before" (Rousseau, [1762] 1955:12). Since liberty is an inalienable right that is grounded in the natural order; then slavery is wrong. Rousseau maintains:

To renounce liberty is to renounce being a man, to surrender the rights of humanity and even its duties. For him who renounces everything no indemnity is possible. Such a renunciation is incompatible with man's nature; to remove all liberty from his will is to remove all morality from his acts. (Rousseau, [1762] 1955: 8).

Rousseau is calling into play the comprehensive doctrine of the liberty of all humans. Slavery, for Rousseau, is the very antithesis of liberty, and liberty is an essential



ingredient of the nature of being human. The philosophical arguments against slavery are clearly being based upon comprehensive doctrines.

The major assault against slavery was launched by the evangelical Christians (Anstey 1975, 184-199). Eric Williams (1964), though he downplays the effectiveness of their arguments in bringing about the abolitionist legislations which were passed in parliament, is forced to recognize their work and their mass appeal:

This study has deliberately subordinated the inhumanity of the slave system and the humanitarianism which destroyed that system. To disregard it completely, however, would be to commit a grave error and to ignore one of the greatest propaganda movements of all time. The humanitarians were the spearhead of the onslaught which destroyed the West Indian system and freed the Negro. But their importance has been seriously misunderstood and grossly exaggerated by men who have sacrificed scholarship to sentimentality and, like the scholastics of old, placed faith before reason and evidence (Williams, 1964: 178).

In spite of Williams's misgivings, he does admit that the humanitarians launched "one of the greatest propaganda movements of all time." The evidence indicates that their arguments were predominantly religious.

Lowell Joseph Ragatz (1897-1978), though he is of the view that the antislavery activists were worsted in the debate, still judges that it was a point of intense controversy. Ragatz says: "No phase of the controversy occasioned greater dispute than did the question of whether the slave trade and slavery were supported or condemned by Scripture" (Ragatz 1971, 256). Granville Sharp was one of the foremost activists and theological thinkers of the antislavery movement of Britain. Sharp argues that slavery

stands condemned based upon the law of love (Sharp, 1776a: 28 - 32) and the law of retribution (Sharp, 1776b: 33 - 36). Slavery cannot coexist with the principle of Christian love. Love is the overarching law by which all mankind is to be judged. It is a comprehensive doctrine that nullifies the validity of slavery. Sharp argues also that the principle of retribution for injustice and oppression is a doctrine hammered out by the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles. Sharp sees slavery as one of the worst forms of oppression and injustice; consequently God will judge all nations that engage in the practice of it. This argument of retributive justice is an aspect of the theological doctrine that God rewards virtue and punishes vice. William Wilberforce speaks in a similar vein when he argues that slavery is contrary to the principles of natural justice. Joseph Butler with his treatise *The analogy of religion* (1736), is Wilberforce's mentor here (Wilberforce, 1805: 51). Butler states:

Upon the whole, there is a kind of moral government implied in God's natural government: virtue and vice are naturally rewarded and punished as beneficial and mischievous to society; and rewarded and punished directly as virtue and vice. The notion then of a moral scheme of government is not fictitious, but natural; for it is suggested to our thoughts by the constitution and course of nature (Butler, 1736: 63).

The doctrine of retribution is a religious comprehensive doctrine. It is one of the doctrines to which the abolitionists appeal in their arguments against slavery.

## 2.7

### Areas of Overlap

The abolitionist appeal is a clear case of overlapping consensus between comprehensive philosophical and religious doctrines. The arguments based upon the

comprehensive philosophical doctrines of equality and liberty overlap with the arguments based upon the theological doctrines of love and retribution in the fight against slavery. This feature of overlapping consensus is clearly observed in the debates that took place in both houses of the British Parliament. These antislavery speeches indicate that the abolitionists are basing their arguments upon comprehensive philosophical and religious doctrines from which they extrapolate the view that slavery is wrong. The discussions in Substance of the debates on a resolution for abolishing the slave trade, give proof of this. In 1806 a resolution is introduced in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords concerning the abolition of the slave trade. The resolution states the following:

That conceiving the African Slave Trade to be contrary to the principles of justice, humanity, and sound policy, this House will, with all practicable expedition, take measures to abolish it, in such a manner, and at such time, as shall be thought advisable (The debate, [1806] 1968: v).

The person who introduces the resolution in the House of Commons is Secretary of State, Charles Fox. He points out that the House of Commons had already in 1792 expressed its view concerning the injustice of the slave trade (The debate, [1806] 1968: 2-5). In the House of Lords, Lord Grenville argues in the same vein that if the slave trade is contrary to humanity, then it must be contrary to justice. He contends:

Does that man exist; is there one human being on the face of the earth, in his senses, who will rise up and say, that the African Slave Trade, lawful or unlawful, is not contrary to humanity? My Lords; if we were to define humanity, what should we say it was? What are its attributes; what is its character? "A sympathy of feeling for the distress of others - a desire to accomplish good ends by good

means." Let any man examine these qualities, and tell you, if he can, how the Slave Trade agrees with them; and if he cannot, I think we can have no difficulty in saying, that the Slave Trade is contrary to humanity (88-90).

After the slave trade is abolished in 1807, the debates continue; but this time for the abolition of slavery itself. In May 1823, a motion is introduced in the House of Commons for "the mitigation and gradual abolition of slavery throughout the British Dominions." In the prospectus of the Society for the mitigating and gradually abolishing the State of Slavery throughout the British Dominions, it is stated that the system of slavery was opposed to "the spirit and precepts of Christianity, as well as repugnant to every dictate of natural humanity and justice" (The debate, [1823] 1968: xi). The motion put to the parliament by Fowell Buxton, contends that the state of slavery is repugnant to the principles of the British Constitution and of the Christian Religion (xxvi). Buxton's motion encapsulates the spirit of overlapping consensus that is at work. Buxton argues passionately that slavery was totally inconsistent with the ideas of rights, justice, equity and law (The debate, [1823]1968: 19).

## **2.8 Political Conception of the Abolitionists**

It seems obvious that the abolitionists are operating with a political conception of justice that is based upon comprehensive philosophical and religious doctrines with appeals to what is conceived to be the British Constitution. Rawls states: "A political conception is at best but a guiding framework of deliberation and reflection which helps us reach political agreement on at least the constitutional essentials and the basic questions of justice" (Rawls, 1996: 156). Buxton's motion introduced to the House of Commons clearly indicates this. Concerning the United States abolitionist movement,

Rawls states in a footnote: “While the abolitionists often argued in the usual way, appealing to political values and political considerations, I assume for purposes of the question that the religious basis of their views was always clear” (Rawls, 1996: 249). With regard to the civil rights movement he says: “Religious doctrines clearly underlie King’s views and are important in his appeals. Yet they are expressed in general terms: and they fully support constitutional values and accord with public reason” (Rawls, 1996: 250).

Rawls’s comments concerning the United States experience suggest very strongly to us that an examination of the ideas and concepts advanced by both the abolitionist and the civil rights movements would reveal to us a similar example of overlapping consensus to that which surfaces in the case of Britain. In the historic British example we obviously have a precedent of the inclusive view at work. Admittedly, times were different; but we do observe that both religious and philosophical arguments surfaced in the public debate. These comprehensive doctrines were reasonable; for they reflected a common concern for justice for all and recognized that slavery was not a situation any person would naturally wish for oneself.

A crucial factor for the working of both the exclusive and inclusive approach to public reason is the practice of civic friendship. David Blacker (2003) calls us to appreciate Rawls’s identifying of “civic friendship” as a catalyst to facilitate fairness in public conversation among the diverse comprehensive doctrines. Concerning this, Rawls states:

Citizens of faith who cite the Gospel parable of the Good Samaritan do not stop there, but go on to give a public justification for this parable’s conclusions in

terms of political values. In this way citizens who hold different doctrines are reassured, and this strengthens the ties of civic friendship (Rawls, 1999b in Freeman: 594).

What Rawls obviously is doing here, is giving a few guidelines as to how citizens may  
3  
conduct public speech when comprehensive doctrines are invoked. Blacker contends:

Civic friendship represents a public way of relating to one another as citizens, where we not only civil in our discourse, but we work positively to overcome mutual suspicion and hostility by bothering to try to understand something of our own and our fellow citizens' deepest moral motivations (Blacker, 2003 in McDonough & Feinberg: 249).

Blacker calls attention to the fact that Rawls makes a distinction between the justification of decisions made by public officials and the practice of public debate by individual citizens in their private capacity. In the case of public officials, the principles of civic friendship would require that the exclusive approach be used. Public officials would avoid appeals to their comprehensive doctrines. In the case of private citizens debating in the public arena, they may use their comprehensive doctrines with discretion and with respect for the different views of others (251-252). In this regard, they may use their comprehensive doctrines to explain their position without expecting their doctrine to be forced upon, or even necessarily shared by others. In the language of Strike, this weak appeal to one's private comprehensive doctrine must be followed by a strong appeal to the public political principle.

## **2.9 Implications for Moral Education and Moral Deliberation**

It is obvious that Rawls's theory, political though it professes to be, is firmly grounded upon moral principles. In addition to this, the idea of an overlapping consensus

is really constructed to deal with moral issues as they are expressed religiously, politically or philosophically. Rawls fails to recognize this and believes that his political conception succeeds in avoiding the conflicts of religious, moral and philosophical comprehensive doctrines. This failure on the part of Rawls, however, carries with it a very positive element: the principle of overlapping consensus is important for the peaceful and orderly existence of pluralistic societies. The principle of overlapping consensus is a much better approach than the practice of pure adversarial debate a means of settling moral disputes. Adversarial debate seeks to win dominance while overlapping consensus seeks conciliation. Overlapping consensus is an idea that can be applied to the field of moral issues whether they are religious, philosophical or political. This and the principles of civic friendship need to be taught in schools. A moral education curriculum ought to include the teaching of the exclusive and inclusive approach to public reasoning for use in moral discourse. We can follow Strike, Greenawalt and Blacker in the distinction they make between the function of public officials making decisions and private citizens deliberating.

For the exercise of the exclusive approach, we can follow Greenawalt and observe a number of “principles of restraint” to guide citizens. These include the following: (1) people should avoid relying upon what Greenawalt calls “non accessible grounds;” these are grounds that are based upon religious beliefs, comprehensive doctrines or controversial ideas of the good; (2) people should try to use public grounds, give greater weight to public grounds and only rely on the excluded grounds when public grounds are indecisive; (3) persons such as judges, legislators, executive officials and politically active citizens or perhaps all citizens or even some of these, but not others, should not

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rely on the excluded grounds in their use of public reason; (4) “people should not rely on excluded grounds for all political subjects, or only for constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice or for some other subset of all political issues.” Greenawalt advances these principles of restraint, in a manner that indicates that there is some room for negotiation within the context of democratic integrity (Greenawalt, 1995: 126-127). These principles of restraint can provide a good basis for a discourse on the exclusive approach to public reason that searches for an overlapping consensus on moral issues.

For the use of the inclusive approach – the approach that incorporates comprehensive doctrines – principles of mutual respect are important. These principles can include the following: (1) we should respect others even though we may dislike their views, their conduct or their customs; (2) we should treat the views of others with respect even though we may disagree with these views or even abhor them; (3) we should respect the sentiments of others even though we may not understand the reasons for them; (4) comprehensive doctrines should always be carefully used with a deep respect for others who may not share those doctrines.

Besides the teaching of the exclusive and inclusive approach, a moral education curriculum ought to include the teaching of the principles of civic friendship as a catalyst for the stimulation of decent democratic discussion. The teaching of the principles of civic friendship would involve: (1) the attempt to understand another’s point of view or another’s culture or another’s sentiments; (2) the emphasis on being sympathetic to another’s dilemma even if one remains unchanged in one’s views. (3) the importance of being conciliatory rather than adversarial in the handling of differences. Also the



principle of reasonableness needs to be as important a concept as the principle of rationality in the school curriculum.

An appreciation of these principles of decent democratic conversation is vital for the peaceful existence of a pluralistic democracy. Robert Nash (1997) recognizes this. While there are some aspects of his philosophical outlook that I do not share, I respect highly his perspective that open moral conversation is of critical necessity for the working of a pluralistic democracy. Nash affirms: “Incommensurable moral languages do overlap at times, and it can be the conversational task to find those points of overlap and crisscross to determine what might fruitfully lead to common moral ground” (Nash, 1997: 177). According to Nash, in a pluralistic democracy, philosophical conversation needs to take the place of attempts at philosophical conquests. This, of course, coincides with the principle of civic friendship. When we consider the variety of peoples with their various beliefs, traditions and backgrounds who constitute the fabric of our contemporary democracies, our schools can become fertile ground for the teaching of understanding and the creating of consensus within this diversity. Our greatest barriers can be transformed into opportune bridges for the fostering of an overlapping consensus of moral principles in our pluralistic societies; and multicultural narratives can play an important part in the formation of such a consensus.

## Footnotes

1.

*A Theory of justice* was first published in 1971. In the 1999 edition Rawls's position on his general conception of justice remains the same.

2.

It is important for us to recognize that Habermas's criticism of Rawls is not a rejection of Rawls's project. Habermas is careful to point out: "Because I admire this project, share its intentions, and regard its essential results as correct, the dissent I express here will remain within the bounds of a familial dispute" (Habermas, 1995: 110).

3.

Within the context of narrative pedagogy, one may be able to use the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate the story's revolutionary concept of the ethic of care without expecting non-Christians to subscribe to its theological authority. Maurice Boutin points out that the parable reverses the definition of "neighbour" from being the "other" to being "oneself." One is to be neighbour to the other (Boutin, 1986 in Olivetti: 725-726).

### CHAPTER 3

#### **MULTICULTURAL NARRATIVES: A VEHICLE FOR ENHANCING THE CREATING OF OVERLAPPING CONSENSUS**

Narrative, along with the cognitive approach, is a reputable way of engaging in moral deliberation for the development of an overlapping consensus. This is so both for the establishing of moral principles in pluralistic societies and for moral education in schools. Narrative can enhance the creating of an overlapping consensus in three main ways: (1) by highlighting the role emotions play in moral reasoning; (2) by providing examples to illustrate in more concrete ways the kinds of particular issues involved in making moral decisions; (3) by providing a pictorial medium that is an easy form of multicultural communication. Narrative involves us in the diverse range of cognitive and emotional aspects of moral decision-making. Narratives help us to appreciate how these decisions can affect people. Beyond question, narrative ought to be used as an important component in developing moral sensitivity in society. This can assist in creating a more compassionate attitude in the midst of our varying comprehensive doctrines. If we are to engage in public discourse with a sense of respect and care for one another we need not only appeal to the mind but also to tug at the heart. Narrative can move us to be more willing to work towards overlapping consensus in the midst of our various comprehensive doctrines.

Scholars have been presenting a variety of perspectives in the narrative school of moral education and moral reflection. These perspectives, varied though they are, illustrate the strong support there is for the role of narrative as an important component of moral education and discourse. These various methods by which moral education is done can also be the means by which we conduct moral discourse as a socio-political form of moral

education, the means by which citizens seek to educate one another on their various approaches to morality. Moral pedagogy can be used for creating guidelines for conducting moral discourse; and principles developed for conducting moral discourse can inform the discipline of moral pedagogy. Narrative can take various forms: self-authorship, fiction, music, dance, poetry and theatre, for example. We shall consider narrative in connection with the cognitive approach characterized by Lawrence Kohlberg, and shall recognize multicultural narratives as a vital means of deliberation in the moral arena as we seek to develop overlapping consensus. Self-authorship and fiction are the two main forms we shall consider as our examples of narrative.

### **3.1 Personal and Emotional Component of Moral Reasoning**

Tappan and Brown contend that stories have the power to effect unity among the thinking, feeling and active dimensions of morality. This aspect of narrative makes provision for the personal, emotional component that ought to be an integral part of moral reasoning. This is important for the constructing of overlapping consensus. Citizens may be more apt to co-operate with those who show that they care than with those who demonstrate that they are simply adept at brilliant philosophical reasoning. Mark Tappan and Lynn Brown argue for the practice of self-authorship as the main means of moral pedagogy:

Our conception of a narrative approach to moral education that encourages students to tell their own moral stories, to speak in their own voices, and hence to authorize their own moral perspectives and experiences, represents one of the ways in which [Paulo] Freire's conception of problem posing pedagogy can be

applied to the practice of moral education in a postmodern world (Tappan and Brown, 1996: 106).

However, we do not have to endorse the pre-eminence of self-authorship as the narrative form to be employed; all we need to do is recognize its validity. A few of the strengths of the self-authored narrative are evident in at least the following areas: (1) it can help one to recognize responsibility for one's actions and attitudes; (2) it anchors one's moral actions in true-life situations, so that the pedagogical power of a personal experience comes into play; (3) it enables people to express their moral views within the context of how it touches them personally. Therefore, when students author their own moral stories, they, in effect, claim authority and thus assume responsibility for their own moral actions (Tappan and Brown, 1991: 180 -181). Self-authorship can also be one way of including the voices of the multicultural community in the public conversation. There may be people who prefer to tell their personal moral stories rather than engage in formal moral theorizing. For example, some holocaust survivors may prefer to tell their story rather than engage themselves in a philosophical discussion on Nazism. This is not to say that formal philosophical discussion is to be downgraded as a means of moral deliberation, but rather that personal narrative is an equally important means of moral communication.

The emotional component of moral reasoning is further emphasized by Carol Gilligan's contribution to moral philosophy. Carol Gilligan argues that Kohlberg's perspective regarding his stages of moral development is bereft of the voice of women and is consequently oblivious to the ethic of care and responsibility – an ethic that figures prominently in the moral concepts of women. The ethic of care is an example of the need for the emotional component in moral reasoning. In a discussion of the results of one of

her studies – a comparison of a boy’s and a girl’s responses to questions about Heinz’s dilemma - Gilligan states:

Just as Jake is confident the judge would agree that stealing is the right thing for Heinz to do, so Amy is confident that, “if Heinz and the druggist had talked it out long enough, they could reach something besides stealing.” As he considers law to “have mistakes,” so she sees this drama as a mistake, believing that “the world should just share things more and then people wouldn’t have to steal.” Both children thus recognize the need for agreement but see it as mediated in different ways – he, impersonally through systems of logic and law, she personally through communication in relationship (Gilligan, 1993: 29).

Gilligan contends that this feminine perspective adds a more accurate reflection of morality:

While an ethic of justice proceeds from the premise of equality – that everyone should be treated the same – an ethic of care rests on the premise of nonviolence – that no one should be hurt... This dialogue between fairness and care not only provides a better understanding of relations between the sexes but also gives rise to a more comprehensive portrayal of adult work and family relationships (Gilligan, 1993: 174).

The relationship between justice and care is an example of the relationship between the cognitive and emotive elements of moral reasoning.

### **3.2 Narrative Moral Exemplars**

While Tappan and Brown emphasize the narrative approach of self-authorship, others contended that students need stories from beyond the self to effect genuine moral

development. William Kilpatrick and Robert Coles are good examples of this latter approach. Kilpatrick does not deny the importance of personal experience, but highlights the role stories from outside can play in moral development. He contends that stories enable us to see more clearly the moral issues involved, and he states, “there is a connection between virtue and vision one has to see correctly before one can act correctly” (Kilpatrick, 1993: 133). Kilpatrick asserts: “One way to counter moral illiteracy is to acquaint youngsters with stories and histories that can give them a common reference point and supply them with a stock of good examples” (Kilpatrick, 1993: 129). Stories are one of the chief ways vision is conveyed; they are verbal visual aids, as it were. Therefore, there is an intimate connection between stories and morality. Like Kilpatrick, Robert Coles sees stories as a means of building character, and he lays emphasis on living up to the Golden Rule. He is of the view that stories play an effective role in calling people to respond to this ideal (Coles, 1997: 10, 17, 25, 29). This approach concentrates on stories as exemplars of the kinds of morality we desire. For Coles, selfishness is a major component of substandard morality (Coles, 1997: 22). He recounts a story of Leo Tolstoy’s to illustrate his point:

As I sat there wondering what to say, I thought of a brief but powerful story by Leo Tolstoy, one that can be read together or taught to anyone at almost any level, from elementary school through high school and college to the various post graduate schools. The story is called “The Old Grandfather and the Grandson”:

The grandfather had become very old. His legs wouldn’t go, his eyes didn’t see, his ears didn’t hear, he had no teeth. And when he ate, the food dripped from his mouth.

The son and daughter-in-law stopped setting a place for him at the table and gave him supper in the back of the stove. Once they brought dinner down for him in a cup. The old man wanted to move the cup and dropped and broke it. The daughter-in-law began to grumble at the old man for spoiling everything in the house and breaking the cups and said that she

would now give him dinner in a dishpan. The old man only sighed and said nothing.

Once the husband and wife were staying at home and watching their small son playing on the floor with some wooden planks: he was building something. The father asked: "What are you doing, Misha?" And Misha said: "Dear Father, I am making a dishpan. So that when you and dear Mother become old, you may be fed from this dishpan."

The husband and wife looked at one another and began to weep. They became so ashamed of so offending the old man, and from then on seated him at the table and waited on him (Coles, 1997: 10 -11).

Stories, for Coles, are the most powerful means of developing good character.

The Coles-Kilpatrick perspective may function well in using our comprehensive doctrines if we are using the inclusive approach of moral discourse. Such stories can illustrate to others the rationale for our personal doctrines in a manner that may be more acceptable than philosophical argumentation. These stories can illustrate to others the kinds of character traits we are recommending for public conduct. Fiction, like self-authorship, can be used in public conversation as a means of arriving at an overlapping consensus.

### **3.3 Dickens's Narrative Philosophy**

Charles Dickens's novels illustrate very vividly both the emotional and exemplifying aspects of moral deliberation exercised in public discourse. William Kilpatrick argues that the Enlightenment philosophy of utilitarianism ignored the human suffering caused by the Industrial Revolution; Dickens's novels, on the other hand, give a human face to the evils of the time (Kilpatrick, 1993: 132 – 133). Kilpatrick maintains that stories are an excellent means of evoking compassion for humanity. It is the kind of approach that is necessary for enhancing the creation of overlapping consensus. He



contends that “utilitarianism oiled the cogs of the Industrial Revolution by providing reasonable justifications for child labour, dangerous working conditions, long hours and low wages.” He contends that it was Charles Dickens who sensitized us to vision of “the human face of child labour and debtor’s prison” (132 -133). What Kilpatrick observes about Dickens is an excellent example of how stories can be used as a means of moral discourse in the midst of contending comprehensive doctrines. They demonstrate how narrative can enhance philosophical argumentation as a medium of moral reasoning. K. J. Fielding argues that *Oliver Twist* is supremely about moral principles in the society of Dickens’s times. The novel is intensely concerned about right and wrong – what ought to be “the basis of our moral principles.” *Oliver Twist* is a rebuttal of “the rationalistic Utilitarianism of its particular time (the 1830s)” (Fielding, 1987: 50). Dickens is engaged in public moral deliberation. Fielding points out that the Poor Law of Dickens’s time “was directly associated with Benthamite Utilitarianism (Fielding, 1987: 53). Kathleen Tillotson concurs with this. She points out that the Poor Law was administered under the direction of Edwin Chadwick, a former secretary to Jeremy Bentham, and Nassau Senior, a “brilliant and ruthless political economist” (Dickens, [1841] 1999: 453). Jeremy Bentham (1834) contends that no act is virtuous unless it coincides with our own happiness. We seek to promote the happiness of others only if it coincides with our own happiness. A person’s duty serves no practical purpose if it does not serve his or her own interests (Goldworth, 1984: 121). Morality that is based upon sacrifice is therefore “mischievous.” This is so because, according to Bentham, such sacrifices cause pain to the individuals rather than happiness. (Goldworth, 1984: 121 -122). Bentham states:

For its ultimate and practical result, this work has for its object the pointing out to each man on each occasion what course of conduct promises to be in the highest degree conducive to his own happiness, first and last; to the happiness of others, no farther than in so far as his happiness is promoted by promoting theirs, than his interest coincides with theirs (Goldworth, 1984:122 -123).

This stress upon self-interest obviously brings to mind the fact that Jeremy Bentham is applying to morality what Adam Smith expounded in economics. In his famous work, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*, Adam Smith (1776) discusses the economic and social importance of an individual pursuing his own self interest and states:

By directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it (Smith, [1776] 1802, vol. 2: 181).

Dickens's narrative portrays vivid examples of how this philosophy and economic theory can work in human society. The novel calls into play the role of human sympathy in the enacting of public policy. It demonstrates that rationality, in the language of Rawls, needs to be tempered by reasonableness. The following conversation between Mr. Bumble, the beadle supervising the workhouse for the poor, and Mr. Sowerberry, the undertaker is an example:

'Gadso!' said the undertaker: taking Mr. Bumble by the gilt-edged lapel of his official coat; 'that's just the very thing I wanted to speak to you about. You know

– dear me, what a very elegant button this is, Mr. Bumble, I never noticed it before.’

‘Yes, I think it is rather pretty,’ said the beadle, glancing proudly downwards at the large brass buttons, which embellished his coat. ‘The die is the same as the parochial seal – the Good Samaritan healing the sick and bruised man. The board presented it to me on New Year’s morning, Mr. Sowerberry. I put it on, I remember, for the first time, to attend the inquest on that reduced tradesman, who died in a doorway at midnight.’

‘I recollect,’ said the undertaker. ‘The jury brought in, “Died from exposure to the cold, and want of the common necessities of life,” didn’t they?’

Mr. Bumble nodded.

‘And they made it a special verdict, I think,’ said the undertaker, ‘by adding some to the effect, that if the relieving officer had –’

‘Tush! Foolery!’ interposed the beadle. ‘If the board attended to all the nonsense that ignorant jurymen talk, they’d have enough to do.’

‘Very true,’ said the undertaker; ‘they would indeed.’

‘Juries,’ said Mr. Bumble, grasping his cane tightly, as was his wont when working into a passion: ‘juries is inedicated, vulgar, grovelling wretches.’

‘So they are,’ said the undertaker.

‘They haven’t no more philosophy nor political economy about ’em than that,’ said the beadle, snapping his fingers contemptuously (Dickens, [1841] 1999: 27 - 28).

Juries, simple ordinary people, cannot understand the lofty concepts of philosophy and political economy that gave rise to the Poor Laws. Dickens is hitting utilitarianism hard. Dickens’s casting of the elderly female, Mrs. Mann, who runs the branch workhouse for poor children, adds to the conversation just quoted:

The elderly female was a woman of wisdom and experience, she knew what was good for children; and she had a very accurate perception of what was good for her. So, she appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use, and consigned the rising parochial generation to even a shorter allowance than was originally provided for them. Thereby finding in the lowest depth a deeper still; and proving herself a very great experimental philosopher (Dickens, [1841] 1999: 4).

Again in the same chapter, Dickens turns his sarcasm upon the board that directs the affairs of the workhouse: “The members of the board were very sage, deep, philosophical men; and when they came to turn their attention to the workhouse, they found out at once, what ordinary folks would never have discovered – the poor people liked it” (Dickens, [1841]1999: 10)! In launching this satire on Bentham’s philosophy of self-interest, Dickens illustrates, through his brilliant narrative, the ridiculousness of a morality based upon rationalistic self-interest. Philosophical theory is one thing – the practical outworking of the theory is another. Abstract moral principles may sound wise to the ear; but when those principles are acted upon by living, breathing human beings the results can be horrifying. This feature of Dickens’s narratives is an important feature for the conducting of public moral discourse. Narrative can help us to understand how laws can affect us in our everyday lives. We need to recognize this when we are working towards an overlapping consensus. Dickens takes us on an imaginative journey into the world of self-interest. One of the most powerful dialogues in *Oliver Twist* is the conversation among the thieves expounding on the principle of routing for number one:

“That stands to reason,” said the Jew. “Some conjurers say that number three is the magic number, and some say number seven. It’s neither, my friend, neither. It’s number one.”

“Ha, Ha!” cried Mr. Bolter. “Number one for ever.”

“In a little community like ours, my dear,” said the Jew, who felt it necessary to qualify this position, “we have a general number one; that is, you can’t consider yourself as number one, without considering me too as the same, and all the other young people.”

“Oh the devil!” exclaimed Mr. Bolter.

“You see,” pursued the Jew, affecting to disregard this interruption, “we are so mixed up together, and identified in our interests, that it must be so. For instance, it’s your object to take care of number one – meaning yourself.”

“Certainly,” replied Mr. Bolter. “Yer about right there.”

“Well you can’t take of yourself, number one, without taking care of me, number one.”

“Number two, you mean,” said Mr. Bolter, who was largely endowed with the quality of selfishness.

“No, I don’t!” retorted the Jew. “I’m of the same importance to you as you are to yourself.”

“I say,” interrupted Mr. Bolter, “yer are a very nice man, and I’m very fond of yer; but we ain’t quite so thick together, as all that comes to.”

“Only think,” said the Jew, shrugging his shoulders, and stretching out his hands; “only consider. You’ve done what’s a very pretty thing, and what I love you for doing; but what at the same time would put the cravat around your throat, that’s so very easily tied and so very difficult to unloose – in plain English, the halter!” Mr Bolter put his hand to his neckerchief, as if he felt it in conveniently tight; and murmured an assent, qualified in tone but not in substance.

“The gallows,” continued Fagin, “the gallows, my dear, is an ugly finger-post, which points out a very short and sharp turning that has stopped many a bold fellow’s career on the broad highway. To keep in the easy road, and keep it at a distance, is object number one with you.”

“Of course it is,” replied Mr. Bolter. “What do yer talk about such things for?”

Only to shew you my meaning clearly,” said the Jew, raising his eyebrows. To be able to do that, you depend upon me. To keep my little business all snug, I depend upon you. The first is your number one, the second my number one. The more you value your number one, the more careful you must be of mine; so we come at last to what I told you at first – that a regard for number one holds us all together, and must do so, unless we would all go to pieces in company” (Dickens, [1841] 1999: 348 - 349). 1

Thieves have no problem living by the principle of self-interest. Rational self-interest works perfectly in the underworld, and Dickens illustrates with graphic vividness how refined rationalistic moral abstractions can be bereft of humanity and care. 2

### 3.4 Multicultural Narrative Consensus

Stories can put into vivid imagery the effects of moral decisions upon society’s diverse communities and thus give a better understanding of how others feel about the various moral issues confronting them. In this context the narratives of the multicultural communities of modern pluralistic democracies can play a very influential role in helping to create a moral overlapping consensus.

Carol Witherell argues that one of the main purposes of narrative in the field of moral education is that we might become “friends of one another’s minds.” This provides for a multicultural component to narrative. Actually, Witherell is expanding on a theme she borrows from Maxine Greene. The importance of this, for Witherell, is illustrated by the emphasis she places upon it in her writings:

The hallmark of moral education is the taking seriously of life and human conduct - in both essence and consequence, accompanied by an empathic call to others to do the same. Such a request requires bringing together the skills of moral deliberation and opportunities for cognitive, affective, and aesthetic responses to human suffering, injustice, caring and joy. It requires becoming ‘friends of one another’s minds’, even, perhaps especially, when the other is ‘stranger’. Maxine Greene may be right to suggest that this might be the only way that education can take place (Witherell, 1991: 238 - 239).

In her article, *Narrative landscapes and the moral imagination*, the main section is entitled: “Teaching through narrative: on becoming ‘the friends of one another’s minds.’” In this section Witherell states: “Maxine Greene has suggested that perhaps education can only take place ‘when we be friends of one another’s minds’.” (Witherell, 1995 in McEwan & Egan: 44). Witherell contends that, because of their general appeal, stories can be a means of creating intercultural understanding and of breaking down barriers among strangers:

In my 20 years of teaching I have found that we can create rich opportunity for genuine dialogue through inviting students to read, receive, and write narratives from oral and written traditions ... in the process of creating and sharing these

stories and reflections, we find ourselves addressing such questions as: From what stories and traditions have I come? How have they shaped who I am and what I might become? What kind of world do I wish to live in? How ought we to live? ... What values and commitments are most important to me and why? ... What do I do when I see things differently from my neighbour? What can I learn from their stories and visions (42 - 43)?

In short, stories can play an important role in developing the moral imagination in multicultural, pluralistic societies. They can also play a creative role in bridging cultural mindsets that may be antagonistic to one another. They can prepare the heart to be aware of, and responsive to the perspective of the other who may subscribe to a different comprehensive doctrine from one's own. This is especially important in pluralistic societies when, in the swirl of comprehensive doctrines, citizens are seeking to work towards an overlapping consensus on issues of public morality. Witherell reminds us that stories enable us to empathize with others: "A good story engages and enlarges the moral imagination." Narrative "enlarges the moral imagination:" because stories allow us to enter empathically into others' lives; they assist us to be more inclusive in our attitudes towards others (Witherell, 1995: 40 - 44). What she says highlights the pivotal role narrative can play in pluralistic societies:

To educate in the moral realm is to enter the world of imagination as well as judgement. What if I had been there? What if I were to experience this dilemma again? What if I were Kuwaiti? Kurd? Israeli? Iraqi? Lithuanian? Such questions are calls for human kinship across the ages and continents - historical and cultural 'imaginings' (Witherell, 1991: 239).

Witherell contends that stories can cross boundaries of time, culture and ethnicity (Witherell, 1995: 45-48). She argues that narrative can help us to understand the moral complexities of the human situation. Stories can assist in bridging the gulf that so often exists among the various cultures of the world. Stories enable us to imagine in a cross cultural way: they enable us to appreciate better how culture molds and shapes our beliefs, our prejudices and our perception of ourselves and of others, and also how others perceive themselves, and how they look at us (Witherell, 1995: 40 – 46). Stories are excellent for opening our eyes to the reality that we are all humans living on the same earth and are frequently faced with similar kinds of moral challenges. Writing about two of her students, she observes:

They shared their stories in ways that led to an expanded intercultural understanding of the human condition, enhancing our sense of the fragility of human goodness and the spaciousness of the moral imagination. Through these and other narratives we became, for even this brief period, a community: “a shared project of human care” (Witherell, 1995: 48).

Stories can be excellent means of helping us to create caring communities out of pluralistic societies – to create the kind of environment that fosters the establishment of overlapping consensus.

Jean Rhys's short story, *The day they burnt the books*, illustrates this possibility. Jean Rhys, a White West Indian, born in the island of Dominica, writes from a Caribbean perspective that is seldom heard. Kenneth Ramchand, in his introduction to Rhys's short story, says: “So we have even in this short piece the differences between White West Indian and expatriate White; a mixed marriage between an Englishman and his erstwhile



beautiful mulatto girl; the loneliness of their son Eddie; the rage of Mrs. Sawyer, and the nearly malevolent indifference of the maid (Ramchand, 1980: 135).

An excerpt from Rhys's tale reads thus:

It was Eddie with the pale blue eyes and straw coloured hair - the living image of this father, though often as silent as his mother - who first infected me with doubts about 'home,' meaning England. He would be so quiet when others who had never seen it - none of us had ever seen it - were talking of its delights, gesticulating freely as we talked - London, the beautiful, rosy-cheeked ladies, the theatres, the shops, the fog, the blazing coal fires in winter, the exotic food (whitebait eaten to the sound of violins), strawberries and cream - the word 'strawberries' always spoken with a guttural and throaty sound which we imagined to be the proper English pronunciation.

"I don't like strawberries," Eddie said on one occasion.

"You don't like strawberries?"

"No I don't like daffodils either. Dad's always going on about them. He says they lick the flowers here into a cocked hat and I bet that's a lie."

We were all too shocked to say, "You don't know a thing about it." We were so shocked that nobody spoke to him for the rest of the day. But I for one admired him. I also was tired of learning and reciting poems in praise of daffodils, and my relations with the few 'real' English boys and girls I had met were awkward. I had discovered that if I called myself English they would snub me haughtily; "You're not English; you're a horrid colonial" (Rhys, 1980 in Ramchand: 137, 138).

Even within small communities multicultural challenges exist. Stories can certainly help us to understand and bridge such gaps. Witherell emphasizes this though she does not like Coles attempt to recommend any specific moral outlook. This is the same sort of approach that Tappan, Brown and Day take. Day and Tappan indicate that they are aware that they are criticized for this: the criticism that "although the narrative may provide a useful way to understand 'what happened' with respect to a person's moral experience, what does it say to a person facing the question of what to do or how to choose in the

context of a given moral dilemma” (Day and Tappan, 1996: 76)? For Day and Tappan, such a situation is no new problem. They argue that their approach stimulates rather than hinders debate on moral issues. They contend that the worst that could happen “would be no more or less problematic than philosophy after Nietzsche or theology after ‘the death of God.’ ” They maintain, however, that they are not taking a relativist position on moral education, rather that dialogue itself constitutes a prescriptive as well as descriptive element in the psychology we outline” (Day and Tappan, 1996: 77).

It is difficult to understand how Day and Tappan can be arguing for narrative as being prescriptive when there is no indication that they are calling for a moral evaluation of the narratives except perhaps in the case of the power relations of those engaged in dialogue. A mere narrative approach to moral education can be but a narrative form of values clarification. It must be pointed out, however, that in spite of their apparently strong argument for a pure narrative approach to moral pedagogy, Tappan and Brown admit that it ought not to be used alone:

We do not want to claim, however, that this approach should be used alone, as the sole means to facilitate moral development – the process of moral development is too varied and complex and the moral world we live in too complicated to justify such hubris. Rather, we suggest that this approach be used in conjunction with other approaches with which it is compatible, in order to provide students with a full range of experiences and opportunities designed to facilitate moral development (Tappan and Brown, 1991 in Witherell & Noddings: 187).

It is rather unfortunate that this expression is not reflected in the arguments of Tappan, Brown and Day. They have argued so strongly for the narrative approach to the extent

that they insist that it is no more problematic than "philosophy after Nietzsche and theology after the death of God." Yet they claim that they are not contending that the narrative methodology ought to be used exclusively. They have not explained what role narrative should play in relation to the other traditional approaches.

If we take the Tappan and Brown statement as the conclusion of the whole matter, then we do not have a major problem concerning the approach to be taken: we can use the cognitive approach of moral reasoning to assist us in finding our moral moorings and we can employ both the general and self authorship forms of narrative to complement the cognitive process. These narratives must be stories from the various multicultural groups comprising the society. Stories have a visionary and emotive power. These stories may even be a less threatening and confrontational way of conveying moral points of view when these points of view are rooted in a variety of comprehensive doctrines. Stories can be an excellent means of seeking to establish overlapping consensus where there is fear or distrust among citizens of varying comprehensive doctrines. Self authored narratives, novels and folklore – all provide a visual and pictorial framework for guiding moral judgement and for enhancing the construction of an overlapping consensus of moral principles.

## Footnotes

1.

Unfortunately, in the passage quoted, Dickens seems to betray some measure of anti-Semitism in his portrayal of “the Jew.”

2.

Martha Nussbaum contends that Gradgrind’s economics in Dickens’s *Hard Times* “has an even greater hold over the political and intellectual life of my society than it did over the society known to Dickens’s characters” (Nussbaum, 1995: 8). She argues that Dickens’s characters can help citizens to think about public policy in flesh and blood terms.

When Louisa goes to visit Stephen Blackpool halfway through *Hard Times*, Dickens emphasizes the fact that she had never before known anything concrete about the lives of factory workers, having learned of their existence only as abstract statistics (Nussbaum, 1995: 9).

## CHAPTER 4

### NARRATIVE AND MORAL PERCEPTION

Narrative brings into focus the role of moral perception in the fostering of moral education and the making of moral decisions. Moral perception is *a more fine-tuned understanding* of the role narrative can play in enhancing the creation of an overlapping consensus. It has to do with a faculty of understanding that is necessary for the making of moral decisions. Perceivers, individuals who possess the skill of moral perception, are the citizens needed in society to create an overlapping consensus of moral principles in pluralistic democracies. A prominent proponent of the necessity of perception in moral decision-making is Martha Nussbaum. Nussbaum's emotive perception is to be seen as a complement to Rawls's cognitive reflection. I shall therefore be advocating that moral perception is to be exercised within the narrative framework in conjunction with moral reflection in order to achieve an overlapping consensus of moral principles in a pluralistic democratic society.

#### 4.1 Moral Perception

In this regard, we shall look at Martha Nussbaum's analysis of Henry James's *The golden bowl* and my analysis of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso sea* to demonstrate how the moral perception of particulars must work in conjunction with moral reflection upon universal and general rules in the making of moral decisions. For the purposes of the establishment of moral principles in public policy - if not for matters of private judgement - the perception of particulars ought to take priority over the reflection upon universal rules. Universal rules, even though they may appear to be fair to all, tend to be based upon comprehensive doctrines. When therefore we seek to apply such universal

rules to moral decision-making in pluralistic societies we can run into serious conflict. If, on the other hand, in the course of deciding on public policy issues we lay priority on perceiving particulars as they affect the various groups in society, then we are more likely to work towards the fostering of an overlapping consensus, than if we pursue a path of seeking to win the day with our universal rules. We ought to be similarly careful also<sup>1</sup> with the use of general rules.

Nussbaum has developed a clearly defined approach to moral philosophy that can contribute further to our understanding of the role narrative can play in making moral decisions. She is a strong advocate of the necessity of practical wisdom or perception as<sup>2</sup> an important feature of making moral decisions. Her notion of perception offers philosophical guidelines as to how stories can be employed as bearers of moral insight. This perception is an important ingredient for the development of overlapping consensus in a cognitive-narrative approach to moral deliberation. Moral development and moral judgement can take place in an interplay between *reflective equilibrium* and *perceptive equilibrium*. Our perception of particulars is to be balanced by a respect for rules that can give reasonable justification for our moral actions.

#### **4.2 Perceptive Equilibrium: Role of the Novel**

This practical wisdom, according to Nussbaum, is best exemplified in literature. For Nussbaum, the novel is the pedagogical vehicle par excellence for developing moral knowledge. Philosophical discourse is to serve as a humble “ally of the literary text,” and “to diverge from some traditional philosophical styles, toward greater suggestiveness” (Nussbaum, 1990: 161). The novel allows us to be in the moral decision-

making process without having to experience the dilemma in reality. It stimulates the imagination to reflect upon moral issues and to develop its own perception and judgements (Nussbaum, 1990: 162). Following Nussbaum, I shall use the novel as the example of narrative. The novel provides for us great detail in understanding people's lives; but I am still open to the possibility that other forms of narrative, such as song and particularly theatre and film, for example, may also be used as media to stimulate perceptiveness in citizens. Personal preferences, educational background, cultural differences can all be influential in determining the narrative form that is best suited for various citizens. We shall, however, pay close attention to Nussbaum's *Love's knowledge* (1990). This text raises pertinent questions about the role of narrative in its relation to cognitive reflection of the Rawlsian type. It brings to the fore the importance of perception or practical wisdom in moral deliberation. Emotive perception is to work hand-in-hand with cognitive reflection in the course of moral deliberation. What *Love's knowledge* discusses is more applicable to the general public than Nussbaum's other works, and it illustrates most vividly her approach to moral philosophy. In *Poetic justice* (1995), she discusses the same theme but demonstrates how the principle ought to work in the legal system: she suggests that judges ought to think of people's lives in the way a novelist does, and she discusses various examples of court cases to flesh out her ideas. With *The fragility of goodness* (2001), she treats the subject of practical wisdom to an appreciable extent, especially with respect to its exposition by Aristotle; but it is in *Love's knowledge*, a compilation of essays, that Nussbaum's moral philosophy is best expressed for the purposes of pedagogy and the moral deliberation of citizens in general. She enunciates her theory of the role of perception in making moral decisions and the

part the novel ought to play in the teaching of this, particularly in "The discernment of perception: an Aristotelian conception of private and public rationality" (54 – 105). This chapter of the book is a persuasive argument for what she advocates as an Aristotelian concept of rationality. Her contention is that practical wisdom - perception - is superior to scientific understanding as a concept of rationality (Nussbaum, 1990: 54-55). Practical wisdom is not an entity that can be quantified and calculated as one does scientific facts. This perception, though rational, is not circumscribed to the rationality of science; it extends beyond it. Nussbaum argues that this perception is not only cognitive, but also emotive and imaginative. Moreover it is prominently exemplified in literature and is desirable not only in private life but also in public policy. According to her, citizens who are perceivers are more likely to formulate public policy that is responsive to the heterogeneous needs of a democracy, than citizens who make judgements primarily based upon rules (Nussbaum, 1990: 55, 103 -104). This claim is important for the construction of an overlapping consensus: perceivers are needed to formulate overlapping consensus from among a plurality of comprehensive doctrines.

Nussbaum is of the view that rationality consists of "three distinct dimensions closely interwoven." She further states: "These are: an attack on the claim that all valuable things are commensurable; an argument for the priority of particular judgements to universals; and a defense of the emotions and the imagination as essential to rational choice" (Nussbaum, 1990: 55). Value is to be found in the intrinsic worth of a thing itself and not based upon some single standard against which other things are judged, because non-commensurability of values is "a picture of choice as a quality-based selection among goods that are plural and heterogeneous, each being chosen for its own distinctive



value (Nussbaum, 1990: 56-57). Such a view is preeminently based upon the priority of the particular to the general. Nussbaum states: "Priority in practical choice should be accorded not to principle, but to perception, a faculty of discrimination that is concerned with apprehending concrete particulars" (Nussbaum, 1990: 68).

This recognition for the priority of the particular calls for flexibility and creativity (Nussbaum, 1990: 96-99), which is very important as a principle for moral decision making and can respond to the multicultural perspectives of a pluralistic society where comprehensive doctrines collide. Perception enables citizens to recognize the moral issues that are dear to others' hearts and consequently to see where adjustments need to be made. A prior perception of particulars can assist citizens to be more aware of others' positions, rather than seeking to coerce others to abide by one's own personal moral rules. Emotions and the imagination are integral aspects of this kind of reasoning. Emotions here, as Nussbaum puts it, "are not Platonic urges and pushes; they possess a high degree of educability and discrimination" (Nussbaum, 1990: 78). She continues: "Emotion can play a cognitive role, and cognition, if it is to be properly informed, must draw on the work of emotive elements."

Such an approach to moral decision making is different from that of Kant, for whom moral choices are to be based upon duty without any dependence upon emotions; so that feelings of sympathy, compassion or care are absolutely irrelevant to true moral choice (Kant, [1785] 1959: 15 -16). Nussbaum's understanding of moral deliberation includes emotion as part of the reasoning process. It is the point at which the moral is similar to the aesthetic. Sharon Bailin (1993) maintains that "the notion of appreciation" is the point of crossover between the aesthetic and the moral realm. Both require

reasoned judgement and emotional response. Bailin observes: "There is no conflict between making justified aesthetic judgement on the basis of rational principles and being emotionally moved by a work; indeed appreciation is incomplete without either of these two aspects" (Bailin, 1993: 101). Concern for others is not only an abstract philosophical principle; it is also an emotional response to the particular needs of others. Caring and empathy are not incompatible with principles and rational morality but are complementary. If people make a good choice but are unhappy about it, then their moral choice loses its credibility. Good people ought to feel good about their good choices. Caring and empathy are very desirable qualities when one is dealing with moral questions in a cross-cultural milieu. This kind of moral reasoning is stimulated by narrative.

This approach to moral philosophy is further exemplified by Nussbaum's interaction with John Rawls. While Rawls advocates the notion of reflective equilibrium as the process by which reasonable judgments may be attained, Martha Nussbaum in her interaction with Rawls advocates what she calls "perceptive equilibrium" as a complement to Rawls's "reflective equilibrium."

Rawls contends that this process, by which one seeks to ensure that one's principles are based upon fair and reasonable judgements, is to be defined as reflective equilibrium:

I assume that eventually we shall find a description of the initial situation that both expresses reasonable conditions and yields principles which match our considered judgments duly pruned and adjusted. This state of affairs I refer to as reflective equilibrium. It is an equilibrium because at last our principles and

judgments coincide; and it is reflective since we know to what principles our judgments conform and the premises of their derivation (Rawls, 1999a: 18).

According to Rawls, in reflective equilibrium we seek through cognitive reflection to make certain that our initial convictions and principles line up with our judgments, so that whatever principles we lay down, they can be reasonably justified as we seek to arrive at a sense of justice. Principles are concepts we lay down initially while judgments are decisions we arrive at through reflection and reasonable justification. This exercise may or may not require us to adjust our principles or revise our judgments, including our sense of justice (Rawls, 1999a: 43). Here Rawls differs from Nussbaum. For Nussbaum, perception of the particular is to be done before one reflects upon the general. For Rawls, the general rule is prior and is brought to bear upon the particular situation. The moral integrity of the judgment arrived at through reflection, is determined by the original position (Rawls, 1999a: 104). In other words, the judgement we arrive at must be the kind of judgement that we would be comfortable with if we did not know what our social status would be in the society. It ought to be a judgement we would consider fair and just if we did not hold political or social sway. Rawls's notion of reflective equilibrium remains the same in *Political liberalism* (1996): "We may reaffirm our more particular judgments and decide instead to modify the proposed conception of justice with its principles and ideals until judgments at all levels of generality are at last in line on due reflection (Rawls, 1996: 45). Reflective equilibrium is the position we arrive at when we ensure that our principles are based upon just judgements.

For Nussbaum, there is need for cooperation between ethical theory and literary theory in the formulation of moral judgments. She sees Rawls's reflective equilibrium as

being representative of the cognitive approach to moral decision making. This is what she calls ethical theory as distinct from her literary theory and she questions whether the equilibrium should really be reflective:

Should this equilibrium indeed be “reflective” – that is, presumably (as Rawls uses the word), a condition that is detached from powerful feeling and from particular situational immersion? Should we in fact exclude our bewilderment and our hesitation from the deliberative process? Should we automatically mistrust the information given us by our fear, or grief, or love? (For being in love would surely count as a case of “being upset.”) Should we in fact go for theories that embody generality and universality – rather than saying, with Aristotle, that “the discrimination lies in perception”? Do we believe that a general (rather than a particular) ordering can be imposed, and imposed in advance, upon conflicting claims? Above all, do we feel that a general system of principles can and should be a court of last appeal in practical reasoning, determining standards all in advance of life itself (Nussbaum, 1990: 175-176)?

Nussbaum’s answer to these overall questions is that literary theory should work together with ethical theory to arrive at moral judgments, and that *reflective equilibrium* is to be balanced, as it were, by *perceptive equilibrium*. This is the kind of approach is required in culturally diverse societies: a willingness to balance particularities with universals and generalities as we seek to arrive at judgements relating to public moral issues. We need to be reflective in order to arrive at what we conceive to be just principles, but all the more to be perceptive in order to determine where consensus lies. Consensus is best achieved when people’s emotions and sentiments are understood and respected, and also when we

take our emotions and sentiments into critical consideration: we need to determine whether our feelings are prejudiced or not. Empathy is the emotional counterpart to reasonableness. If the Quebec Government and the school community were more sympathetic to Gurbaj, they would have sought to arrive at a reasonable consensual solution to the disagreement rather than simply to win the argument. Furthermore, if individuals who cast their slurs were to perceive the nature of their racist feelings towards the boy, they may have been more likely to realize that their judgements may have been prejudiced rather than fair (See 1.1). This kind of perceptiveness is important for achieving overlapping moral consensus in the public sphere in multicultural, pluralistic societies. Cognitive rational arguments do not necessarily move the heart; consensus may be more easily achieved when the heart is moved compassionately towards the other, and perception involves both heart and mind. Nussbaum maintains that perceptive equilibrium is the hallmark of literary theory:

In the new norm of perception...there is a bewildering problem about authority. For if the ethical norm consists not in obeying certain antecedently established general rules, but in improvising resourcefully in response to the new perceived thing, then it is always going to remain unclear, in the case of any particular choice or vision, whether it is correctly done. This does not mean that there are no criteria and anything goes. But it does mean that the standard will ultimately be nothing harder or clearer than the conformity of this choice or description to those of agents on whom we can rely for competent judgement ...the judgement of a certain type of person, the person of practical wisdom (Nussbaum, 1990: 181-182).

However, this way of perceiving does make use of universal principles, but the challenge would be for us to determine how and when these rules and principles are to be employed. Interestingly, Nussbaum's notion of perceptive equilibrium is not really excluded by Rawls. Though Rawls does not like Nussbaum spell out a theory of the perception of particulars, he recognizes the importance of it:

It is a mistake to think of abstract conceptions and general principles as always overriding our more particular judgements. These two sides of our practical thought (not to mention intermediate levels of generality in between) are complementary, and to be adjusted to one another so as to fit into a coherent view (Rawls, 1996: 45).

It would seem, then, Rawls and Nussbaum complement each other. The challenge, though, will be to determine where to situate one's judgements along the polarity between perception and rule: to establish a balance between perceptive equilibrium and reflective equilibrium. According to Nussbaum, literature can play an important part in exemplifying this practical wisdom and also in developing our faculties of perception: "The commitment of Aristotelian practical wisdom to rich descriptions of qualitative heterogeneity, to context-sensitive perceiving, and to emotional and imaginative activity has already suggested to us that certain sorts of novels would be good places to see the good of this conception fittingly expressed" (Nussbaum, 1990: 85). To illustrate this Nussbaum quotes a section of Henry James's *The golden bowl*, dealing with the deliberation of the character, Maggie Verver. Nussbaum then says: "Maggie's deliberation shows us quite clearly what it means to say that imagination and emotional response have a guiding role to play in perception and that they are partly constitutive of moral knowledge" (Nussbaum, 1990: 91). This kind of reasoning ought to become the

hallmark of our educational process; according to Nussbaum, the aim is to encourage the emergence of a society of perceivers. In addition to this, Aristotelian perception ought to be the foundation of public polity. Leaders should be Aristotelian rationalists: individuals who are both cognitive and perceptive in their approach to matters of public judgement (Nussbaum, 1990: 97-104). Nussbaum maintains: "A rational Aristotelian adult will have a reasonably good understanding of what courage, justice, friendship, generosity, and many other values are" (Nussbaum, 1990: 60). Consequently, "Aristotelian education is aimed at producing citizens who are perceivers. It begins with the confident belief that each member of the heterogeneous citizenry is a potential person of practical wisdom, with the basic (that is, as yet undeveloped) ability to cultivate practical perception and use it on behalf of the entire group" (Nussbaum, 1990: 103).

What Nussbaum advocates here is particularly important for the development of the skill of public reasoning in the moral field in pluralistic societies. To accomplish this, educators would have to lay importance upon the humanities as foundational for the learning process. Science, technology, business and commerce – important as they are – should not be allowed to obliterate the need for paying attention to the humanities as vital for the development of perceivers. Citizens are to be educated, rather than merely trained for specific skills. An educated perceptive citizenry is a necessary prerequisite for the disposition that will be open to promoting a process that encourages the formation of an overlapping consensus on public moral issues. While it is important to understand the role rules play in the moral deliberation process, perceivers are necessary for the development of overlapping consensus in pluralistic societies, because they are more likely to be disposed to be reasonable and empathetic than pure cognitive rationalists.

For Nussbaum, Henry James's *The golden bowl* is a concrete literary example of how Aristotelian moral perception ought to work (Nussbaum, 1990: 148). Moral perception is the performing of "acts of altruism without reliance on rules of duty, improvising what is required" (149). The particulars that demonstrate this are the altruistic acts Maggie and her father express to each other. Nussbaum states: "For the acts to be recorded can be said to be paradigmatic of the moral: his sacrifice, her preservation of his dignity, his recognition of her separate and autonomous life" (149). These moral acts, according to Nussbaum, are paradigms because they are done "in the right way at the right time in the right tone" (150). The idea is that moral perception is more than being able to make sacrifices: it is making those sacrifices with imagination and feeling and responsiveness: "Moral knowledge, James suggests, is not simply intellectual grasp of particular facts; it is perception. It is seeing a complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling" (152). Imagination "achieves its moral goal in the finding of the right way of seeing" (152) followed by practical responsibility. "The right 'basis' for action is found in the loving dialogue of the two" (155). All of this rightness can only be determined as one responds to the particular situation. In the language of Nussbaum, one has to be willing to "improvise." (155)

This improvisation is illustrated by "the analogous contrast between the symphony player and the jazz musician." Nussbaum declares:

The jazz player, actively forging continuity, must choose in full awareness of and responsibility to the historical traditions of the form, and must actively honor at every moment his commitments to his fellow musicians, whom he had better



know as well as possible as unique individuals. He should be more responsible than the score reader, and not less, to the unfolding continuities and structures of the work. These two cases indicate to us that a perceiver who improvises is doubly responsible: responsible to the history of commitment and to the ongoing structures that go to constitute her context; and especially responsible to these, in that her commitments are internalized, assimilated, perceived, rather than read off from an external script or score (Nussbaum, 1990: 155 -156).

Improvising in moral perception, like the playing of jazz, is not the complete abandoning of all rules; rather it is operating within a general framework of principles, but responding to the particular. It is “to see more deeply into the relationship between the fine-tuned perception of particulars and rule-governed concern for general obligations: how each, taken by itself, is insufficient for moral accuracy” (Nussbaum, 1990: 157). The particular is not of itself sufficient; it is, nevertheless, prior.

This priority of the particular operates within the circle of “the agent’s moral and social education”: the “plain man’s” “common-sense values” can give guidance “as to where we might start looking for the right particular choice.” There is to be constant intercourse between “perception and rule” (Nussbaum, 1990: 158). The moral perception growing out the immediacy of the particular is to be offered only as a “tip” (Nussbaum, 1990: 159), and the tip is “to give a gentle hint about how one might see” (Nussbaum, 1990: 160). This gentleness is a reflection of the love that undergirds the interplay between perceptions and rules. This kind of approach is important especially where people are strongly divided by entrenched comprehensive doctrines and citizens are making efforts to establish an overlapping consensus.

Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso sea* is another excellent example of a novel that portrays the difference between moral judgements made purely from the grounds of rules and those made using perception. It illustrates how perception can help us to be sensitive to the needs of others. Such sensitivity is vital if we are seeking to work towards consensus. An understanding of the needs of others can help us to work towards conciliation and overlapping consensus rather than competition and conquest.

Rhys uses Bertha, the mentally ill wife of Edward Rochester, as the main character of her plot. Edward Rochester, who attempted to commit bigamy, as we may recall, is a main character in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Rhys weaves a story, set in the 1830s, located in Jamaica and Dominica, depicting the life of Antoinette (Bertha) a member of the declining West Indian plantocracy. *Wide Sargasso sea* is a voice of the white West Indian of the immediate post emancipation era. It illustrates that people of wealth and privilege are also humans who experience the plight of suffering and deserve our compassion. In addition to this, the women of the wealthy face subtle forms of oppression. Antoinette and her mother Annette are rich, but rejected. Antoinette says to Edward: "I have heard the English women call us white niggers" (Rhys, 1966: 85). They are not only rejected by the English born whites but also by the former slaves:

"Did you hear what that girl was singing?" Antoinette said.

"I don't always understand what they say or sing. Or anything else."

"It was a song about a white cockroach. That's me." (Rhys, 1966: 85).

This rejection creates an identity crisis within the white West Indians. Antoinette declares to Edward: "Between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all" (Rhys, 1966: 85).

Edward cannot respond in compassion to the particulars of Antoinette's situation. He treats her as a category. He responds to her based upon her mother's insanity without caring to know what drove Annette, Antoinette's mother, to insanity. Edward, like Mr. Mason, his father-in-law, is superficially kind but is incapable of genuine love. Edward foists upon Antoinette the category of insanity and rejects her. He digs up her family history rather than responds to her as a person. He treats her as a case instead of as a living being. He categorizes her, rather than be sensitive to her. Christophine, Antoinette's family servant, pleads with Edward on Antoinette's behalf:

I know that girl. She will never ask you for love again, she will die first. But I Christophine I beg you. She love you so much. She thirsty for you. Wait, and perhaps you can love her again. A little, like she say. A little. Like you can love.

I shook my head and went on shaking it mechanically (Rhys, 1966: 129).

Edward's kind of attitude militates against the formation of consensus. It puts people into social or even other types of categories and then treats them according to the category determined for them, so that one is less able to respond caringly to their individual needs. The category becomes the rule that determines how one treats them and their views. In the public sphere this can happen if certain groups of people are classified by the problems they face and certain moral rules are imposed upon them by the rest of society. Such an attitude does not predispose us to seek to understand their needs and to work with them towards an overlapping consensus.

Edward fails to be as perceptive as Christophine. He cannot find compassion in his heart for his wife. Rhys's main male characters are cognitive rationalists making judgements based upon preconceived categories; her women are emotive perceivers who

seek to respond to the realities of particulars. Edward and Christophine talk about

Antoinette:

“Because you hurt her she want to hurt you back, that’s why.”

“And that her mother was mad. Another lie?”

Christophine did not answer me at once. When she did her voice was not so calm.

“They drive her to it. When she lose her son she lose herself for a while and they shut her away. They tell her she is mad, they act like she is mad. Question, question. But no kind word, no friends, and her husban’ he go off, he leave her. They won’t let me see her. I try, but no. They won’t let Antoinette see her. In the end – mad I don’t know – she give up, She care for nothing” (Rhys, 1966: 129-130).

For Christophine, Antoinette’s madness is more than a cold rational category. It is the condition of a woman that is hurt, rejected, and lonely.

This understanding of people’s particular situation, this sensitivity to people’s needs, this capacity for love is very important for providing the perceptive ability that is necessary for making moral decisions in the public domain.

Jean Rhys paints a perceptive picture of the struggles of a white West Indian woman during the close of the first half of the nineteenth century. Rhys illustrates how love can help us to recognize the needs of others during the course our moral deliberation. Rhys shows how mere rules can cause hurt to others because of failure to respond to their particular situation. Rhys’s is a fair example of the perceptive model. She illustrates the fact that minorities, even white minorities, can face oppression. Oppression is a common human problem. Jean Rhys is a voice of the white West Indian minority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hers is a voice reminding us that people of multicultural, multiethnic

societies need to listen to the voices of one another. Multicultural pluralistic societies can be fertile ground for the emergence of stories that can provide pedagogical resources for moral education and also perspectives that can inform the moral decision process.

Multicultural societies are composed of communities and groups in which people operate by a variety of comprehensive moral doctrines. Practical wisdom plays a vital role in assisting citizens to arrive at an overlapping consensus in establishing moral principles for public policy. Civic love is, at the very least, as important an issue as civic justice. Nussbaum rightly advocates that civic love is to be a prerequisite for the establishment of civic justice. When citizens are encouraged to care for one another then they are more likely to seek for justice for one another and to work towards an overlapping consensus on the vexing moral differences that challenge them.

#### **4.3 Nussbaum's Perception: A Problem**

Henry James's *The golden bowl* depicts two features of Maggie Verver's life that James uses to illustrate and expound his moral philosophy: firstly, Maggie's "assiduous aspiration to perfection, especially moral perfection;" secondly, "the exclusive intensity of her love for her father, the oddness of her marriage to the Prince" (Nussbaum, 1990: 125 -126). According to Nussbaum, there is a tension between Maggie's desire to be morally perfect and the obligation to be a committed wife. Nussbaum says:

Maggie, then, wants to be as good as possible; and when she says this, it is evidently moral goodness that is uppermost in her thoughts. If we ask more closely about what, for her, constitutes moral perfection, we find the central idea is one of never doing a wrong, never breaking a rule, never hurting ... The "note of the felt need of not working harm," "the superstition of not 'hurting'" – these

are the concerns pressed urgently by her “quite heroic little sense of justice” in every situation of choice (126).

Nussbaum continues:

Morality and its rules of not hurting constitute for her a safe world in which to live and voyage, protected against nameless dangers. If ever a breach were made in the walls of that vessel, if even one seam should give way – but she does not dare to imagine that. She avoids it. She sits in the liner (perhaps the same vessel that Fanny refers to later as “Mr. Verver’s boat”) and reads only what the captain, or father has provided for the trip (126).

The dilemma Maggie faces is to become “a real lady” to her husband. This would require Maggie “to abandon her father, to wound him by ceasing to be his companion in all things,” “leads Maggie, even in marriage with a man to whom she is deeply attracted, so to repress her womanly responses that Fanny can confidently and, we feel, correctly assert that she has never really ‘had’ the Prince”(129). This dilemma involves the fact that Maggie fails to appreciate her father as an individual rather than as part of herself. Nussbaum states:

Moral objectivity about the value of a person (or, presumably, any other source of moral claims) requires, evidently, the ability to see that item as distinct from other items; this in turn requires the ability to see it not as a deep part of an innocent harmony but as a value that can be contrasted or opposed to others, whose demands can potentially conflict with other demands (131).

Nussbaum sees this as requiring that we accept a dualistic approach to morality. She states: “Knowledge of a good, that is to say a value, in the world requires, we see, knowledge of evil, that is to say of the possibility of conflict, disorder, the contingent necessity of breaking

or harming. Without eating this fruit she is just a child, ignorant of the value of the good as well” (Nussbaum, 1990: 131). For Nussbaum, the world of *The golden bowl* is a world that is fallen and consequently in it one cannot safely preserve one’s innocence. There is no guarantee that human fidelity can be intact throughout life: “In this world our first choice as adults is the choice to pursue our personal goals at the expense of a separation from and a break with the parent” (133).

For Nussbaum, the second part of the novel tells the story of Maggie’s life in her fallen world. This world requires a new ideal. It is different from the ideal of the innocent:

We might describe the new ideal this way: See clearly and with high intelligence. Respond with the vibrant sympathy of a vivid imagination. If there are conflicts, face them squarely and with keen perception. Choose as well as you can for overt action, but at every moment remember the more comprehensive duties of the imagination and emotions. If love of your husband requires hurting and lying to Charlotte, then do these cruel things, making the better choice. But never cease, all the while, to be richly conscious of Charlotte’s pain and bear, in imagination and feeling, the full burden of your guilt as the cause of that pain (Nussbaum, 1990:134-135).

Nussbaum argues that Maggie’s new approach to morality is that “she assumes this world’s burden of sin not by going into exile or dying but by sinning, and by seeing that she is sinning, and by bearing, for love, her own imperfection” (135).

Nussbaum’s perception here is problematic. She seems to be advocating that we can hurt, wound and deceive some in order to preserve our special relationship with others. Our love for some would require us to hurt others and bear the guilt our “sin” honourably. It is at this point I do question Nussbaum’s perception.

Philip Broughton's article in *The Montreal Gazette* of December 6, 2001, partly illustrates my concern. David Greenglass, the brother of the spy Ethel Rosenberg, lied under oath against her to protect himself and his wife, and thus sent Ethel and her husband to the electric chair. Broughton writes:

Though they never confessed to spying, the Rosenbergs were undone by Greenglass's testimony. He told the court that Ethel Rosenberg transcribed her husband's notes on a portable Remington typewriter before the information was sent to the Soviet Union. This made her a conspirator. Greenglass's wife, Ruth, corroborated his testimony, which made up the bulk of the prosecution's case against Ethel. But now Greenglass says he said whatever would lessen his sentence. He says that Roy Cohn, who was then a prosecutor on the case, encouraged him to lie and he took his advice. He said although he still thinks about the case, which resulted in his serving seven years in prison, "My wife says, 'Look we're alive'" (Broughton, 2001: C16).

David Greenglass obviously preserves his commitment to himself and his wife. He effectively severs the innocent (Jamesian-Nussbaumian) filial relationship to his sister and preserves his life and that of his wife. But is this an act of cowardice or an act of love? Does love mean that we care for our own to the point of lying on others? How far do Nussbaum and James allow us to go into 'sin' in order to honour our adult responsibilities? This is what I consider to be the dilemma the Nussbaum approach poses. Of course, one may argue that in the case of Maggie, she lied to preserve the relationship among her father, her husband and friend. Hers was not a selfish act like that of the Greenglasses. Yet the questions remain: Is deception a real basis for love? Could not perception lead us to speak the truth in love,



inflicting pain as gently and lovingly as we can? If the truth hurts, is not that part of being human: living with the pain of our human weakness of not being able to face up to the truth? If love advocates lying, even if it is to avoid hurting, is not such a love laying a foundation for distrust? If deception is one of the foundation stones upon which love rests is not that love questionable? Is it not possible to confront wrong and be prepared to be forgiving? It would seem here that while there is indeed a need for a principle that incorporates all into the circle of love, there is also a need for a perception that seeks to arrive at a moral decision that can accommodate both truth and love. Nussbaum, however, does admit that there needs to be “the dialogue between perception and rule” (Nussbaum, 1990: 157). She is calling for the priority of the perception of the particular and not for the exclusive use of the perception of the particular; but the possibility exists that she herself may fall short of being able to achieve her own ideal at all times. She states:

Bob Assingham is a man devoted to rules and to general conceptions. He permits himself neither surprise nor bewilderment – in large part because he does not permit himself to see particularity...because he allows himself to see only what can be classified beforehand under a general term, he cannot have any moral responsibilities – including amusement – that require recognition of nuance and idiosyncrasy...

Fanny, on the other hand, takes fine-tuned perception to dangerously rootless extreme. She refuses to such an extent the guidance of general rules that she is able to regard the complicated people and predicaments of her world with an aestheticizing love, as “her finest flower-beds” – across which he is, to her displeasure, always taking “short cuts” (Nussbaum, 1990: 157-58).

Nussbaum is advocating that the dialogue between rules and perceptions is to be based upon love. Love itself is “in the sphere of perception that antecedes any moral agreement.” We must first love one another if we are “to achieve the shared perceptions of the actual.” It is love that will enable us to make sensitive, perceptive, decisions in the midst of disagreements. Nussbaum maintains:

Progress comes not from the teaching of an abstract law but by leading the friend, or child, or loved one – by a word, by a story, by an image – to see some new aspect of the concrete case at hand, to see it as this or that. Giving a “tip” is to give a gentle hint about how one might see. The “tip” here, is given not in words at all but in a sudden show of feeling. It is concrete, and it prompts the recognition of the concrete (Nussbaum, 1990: 160).

For Nussbaum, the moral role of rules, in this perspective, “can only be shown inside a story that situates rules in their appropriate place vis-à-vis perceptions” (Nussbaum, 1990: 160).

Concerning the interplay between the two characters Bob and Fanny, Nussbaum writes:

The dialogue between his rules and her perceptions is motivated and sustained by a love that is itself in the sphere of perception that antecedes any moral agreement. James suggests that if, as members of moral communities, we are to achieve shared perceptions of the actual, we had better love one another first, in all our disagreements and our qualitative differences. Like Aristotle, he seems to say that civic love comes before, and nourishes civic justice (Nussbaum, 1990: 160).

Nussbaum’s argument does raise a very important feature of the moral decision process: the necessity of responding to particulars rather than being dominated by inflexible rules.

Nussbaum argues that the crucial prerequisite for practical wisdom is a long experience of

life that yields an ability to understand and grasp the salient features of a situation. This enables the perceiver to be the kind of person who is able to make wise judgements; yet Nussbaum still seems to leave much wide open. The answer may lie in the nature of the interaction between perception and rule and also in our understanding of the nature and scope of love. What these questions illustrate very clearly, however, is the fact that narrative can bring into vivid focus the pertinent issues that one must consider when making moral judgements.

Martha Nussbaum, like Robert Coles or William Kilpatrick (see 3.4), is to be highly respected when she calls for stories as an important means of developing moral sensitivity. For Nussbaum, stories are even better than moral philosophical argumentation or categorization (Nussbaum, 1990: 161). Here Nussbaum is obviously at odds with the Kohlberg-Colby stages of moral development:

One way of understanding the three levels is to think of them as three different types of relationships between the self and society's moral rules and expectations. From this point of view, Level 1 (preconventional) is a perspective from which rules and social expectations are something external to the self; in the Level 2 perspective the self is identified with or has internalized the rules and expectations of others especially those of authorities; and the Level 3 (postconventional) perspective differentiates the self from the rules and expectations of others and defines moral values in terms of self chosen principles (Colby and Kohlberg, 1987: 16).

At a glance, it may appear that there is little or no difference between Nussbaum's Aristotelian perception and Kohlberg's stage 6 about which he says:

Right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with selfchosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. These principles are abstract and ethical (the Golden Rule, the categorical imperative); they are not concrete moral rules such as the Ten Commandments. At heart, these are universal principles of justice, of the reciprocity and equality of human rights, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individuals (Kohlberg, 1981: 19).

Kohlberg's model for morality is grounded upon "principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality and consistency." Nussbaum's, on the other hand, is grounded upon the priority of the perception of particulars, a stance that calls for improvisation, flexibility and the perceptive response to surprise. Kevin McDonough is very concerned about these issues. He is concerned that the use of moral examples in narrative is used constructively. For McDonough, this means that moral examples ought to illustrate the complexity of making particular, perceptive judgments rather than the importance of obeying moral rules or following clearly defined moral principles:

As any historian, anthropologist, or lover of good literature, knows, a careful scrutiny of the contexts within which moral judgments are made often forces us to seriously question, doubt and revise our common sense principles, rather than to strengthen our commitment to such rules. This is surely a desirable feature of mature moral judgment, but Hare's conception of rule based moral education, and the use of examples it implies, must impede its development (McDonough, 1994: 81).

However, this dichotomy may not be necessary if we view narratives as important exemplars of both the reflective and perceptive aspects of moral decision-making. We can

certainly use narrative to illustrate rules and principles, and also to show the sensitivity and perception needed for the practice of moral education and for the establishing public moral principles in pluralistic societies.

For Nussbaum, perception is prior; for Kohlberg and for Colby, it is principle and rule that take priority. Colby and Kohlberg argue that moral judgements are prescriptive: “They are imperatives deriving from some rule or principle of action that the speaker takes as binding on his own actions.” Furthermore, moral judgements are universalizable prescriptions (Colby and Kohlberg, 1987: 10). Colby and Kohlberg insist that the essence of virtue is justice: “Justice within the normative order orientation is impartial, just, or consistent maintenance of general rules” (Colby and Kohlberg, 1987: 11). This justice, however, needs to be tempered with care. Seeking to understand and be sensitive to the needs of the other is vital for the achieving of overlapping consensus. Citizens may be more likely to make adjustments to accommodate others not only if others understand their points of view but also if others demonstrate sympathy for their feelings. This kind of caring attitude is best illustrated by narrative.

#### **4.4 Overcoming Dominance**

One hurdle that has to be overcome in order for the narrative approach to become genuinely effective within a pluralistic milieu is the need for the dominant groups in a society to be aware of how dominance can exclude the voice of powerless groups (and they may not always be a minority) from participating in the social narrative. The cultural rules of the dominant groups need to be responsive to the particular situations of disadvantaged groups. Dwight Boyd (1996) and Barbara Applebaum (1997) show great concern about this question of dominance. Boyd says: “As a philosopher I am particularly

interested in questions related to how we conceive and justify what we would be doing in moral education” (Boyd, 1996: 21). The tendency for moral philosophers to be factional in their varied approaches to moral education contributes to the very conditions they ought to be seeking to improve. Boyd calls for greater openness in our understanding of the way in which the various approaches differ and why they differ and how they can inform one another. Beyond this, Boyd is also calling for “a significant reorientation of focus” in which moral relationships are considered not merely in the context of “individuals and their interactions with other individuals,” but also in the context of “group relations;” groups, “which often determine their life prospects to a high degree because the relationship between groups is usually one of power, systematically expressed through the main institutions of society” (Boyd, 1996: 24 – 26). Boyd further argues:

The critical point that I wish to emphasize here is that focusing exclusively on individual moral relationships and limiting concern for objectivity to this context serves to hide the very questions that need to be asked when it is recognized and genuinely accepted that individuals are part of groups that have different forms of grounding, and groups themselves do not have equal power to advance their point of view (Boyd, 1996: 28).

Barbara Applebaum points out how the matters raised by Boyd are important for the issue of racism – racism based not so much upon prejudice, but rather upon “the dominant norms and standards which silence, marginalize and subordinate certain groups of people in western society and which thereby contribute to oppression and social injustice.” This type of racism, Applebaum observes is generally unintentional (Applebaum, 1997: 410).

In order to overcome this problem, Applebaum advocates that dominant groups must be prepared to look critically at themselves and their political and social position. This approach helps “in raising the awareness of dominance,” rather than merely “descriptively revealing dominance,” which tends to generate rancor (Applebaum, 1997: 411). People who desire to be moral are people who may be open to reflect upon their cultural values: “Perhaps one of the great contributions of a pluralistic society is the variety of worldviews it offers as reference points from which one can see one’s own values in a different light” (Applebaum, 1997: 415). James Line’s testimony illustrates this

My parents did not consider themselves prejudiced either, but we were all conditioned to be that way. Living in a white community in Pennsylvania, I was taught – just as my parents had once been taught – to avoid predominantly black neighborhoods. We referred to black people in a derogatory manner – not out of hatred but out of fear and suspicion.

I had accepted Jesus as my Savior in July 1987, when I was 14. That’s when God called me to the ministry, and I began to think that one day I would be an evangelist... But even though my Christian walk was deepening, my prejudice remained unchanged.

While attending a youth convention in Pittsburgh, I saw a black man talking on a pay phone. I remarked to a white friend that the man was probably talking to his drug dealer. Jerry, also at the convention, overheard me and asked, “Why do you think that he’s a drug user just because he’s black?”... During my years at Bible college, I struggled with my racism...

In June 1995, as part of a three-month internship necessary to complete my major, I was required to move into a black neighborhood. I would live with a black family in the government housing projects of Washington, D.C. Thinking of drugs and violence; I was so scared that I cried the night before I moved in with Tony Yates, the Assistant Pastor of a church in Washington.

It was a mind-blowing experience from the very first day when Tony told me that I was family to him. He and his family immediately accepted me and loved me, and they let me live with them rent-free throughout the duration of my internship...the members of his church accepted me with equal enthusiasm, and many of them invited me to their homes...

Pastor Mathieu, a white man who had started an inner city evangelistic work in 1970, taught me that my fear of crime and violence among black people was exaggerated... Soon the wall of my prejudice fell... Throughout my experiences, I always keep in mind that I'm also a student; the people to whom I minister often teach *me*.

Once I feared the black neighborhood; now I call it "home" and I am proud to live here. Whenever people mention that I live in the roughest part of Washington, D.C., I explain that they are talking about my family, my neighborhood (Line, 1998: 14 -15).

In this story, a number of pertinent elements are present: self-authorship, dialogue ("The people to whom I minister often teach me") and, to some extent, the raising of the awareness of dominance. This story illustrates that Boyd and Applebaum are highlighting important issues for an equitable non-oppressive attitude in developing a moral pedagogy in pluralistic societies. The issue of recognizing and overcoming dominance also raises the possibility that emphasis on the various forms of narrative by different philosophers may be but a reflection of their particular personal tastes or educational and cultural background. Strong arguments may also be made for the use of theatre, music or film as media for conveying narrative as opposed to literature, for example. Personal taste or culture may determine a choice of self-authorship or fiction as the genre to be employed. We may not need to argue for the dominance of any particular form of narrative as the moral pedagogical paradigm. Nussbaum's insistence on the novel as the best medium for the exercise of moral philosophy is laying down a rule without considering that there may be cultural or individual particulars that may call for other forms of narrative to be employed. We probably should simply maintain that the presence of narrative be an integral part of the moral exercise. Moral educators in conjunction with their students may have to determine which form or forms of narrative best suit their particular



situation. They can use these narratives in the way I indicated. Citizens can also decide for themselves the form of narrative communication that suits them best. This kind of attitude can facilitate the emergence of a multiplicity of narratives authored by people of various groups in their own voices. These voices are to be recognized not as a concession granted by the dominant culture, but as equal participants in the moral conversation of the society. Narratives offer fascinating insights if they are used to hear the moral voices of all the communities of a pluralistic society, and these insights can contribute towards the formation of an overlapping consensus of moral principles that can inspire social conduct.

## Footnotes

1.

Nussbaum makes a distinction between general and universal rules:

Here we must distinguish, as Aristotle himself does not, or does not with clarity, the *general* from the *universal*. The *general* is opposed to the *concrete*; a general rule not only covers many cases, it applies to them in virtue of some rather non-concrete characteristics. A *universal* rule, by contrast, applies to all cases that are relevant in ways similar; but a universal may be highly concrete, citing features that are not very likely to be replicated. Many moral views that base correct choice on universal principles employ principles of broad generality (Nussbaum, 1990: 67).

My suggestion is that it may be simpler to conceive of general rules to be the result of partial comprehensive doctrines while universal rules to be the offshoot of fully comprehensive doctrines.

2.

In the Greek the word is *phronesis*. Practical wisdom has to do with the ability to make choices between extreme alternatives (Wedin in Audi, 1999: 50)

## CHAPTER 5

### RECOGNITION AS THE MORAL PREREQUISITE FOR MULTICULTURAL EQUALITY IN PUBLIC SPEECH

One important aspect of overcoming dominance as it relates to the field of education is its relevance to the facilitating of multicultural equality in public speech in pluralistic societies. Citizens of the various cultural groups that comprise pluralistic societies must have a sense of equal authority to participate in public democratic conversation. This aspect of overcoming dominance is important for the encouragement of multicultural public speech for the formation of overlapping consensus. If we are to respect multicultural narratives as equal participants in the moral conversation it is imperative that we give equal recognition to the cultures from which these narratives spring. Citizens will not respect the narratives of other groups if they believe that the people of those groups are of inferior intelligence. In other words, recognition of the contribution of the peoples and the cultures of the world to the pool of global knowledge is an important moral issue that relates to our academic curricula at all levels of education. Note carefully: we are talking about *education as a whole*. Our *general educational system* has to prepare the way for the flourishing of equal multicultural moral conversation in the public sphere. Such an approach to education is a necessary prerequisite for the equal acceptance of multicultural narratives within pluralistic societies. This recognition is a necessary prerequisite for the development of an overlapping consensus among the moral perspectives of any multicultural, pluralistic society. It is a necessary prerequisite to prepare the minds of citizens of pluralistic democracies to accept all multicultural narratives with equal

respect. If students are taught that the foundations of education were all laid down in Greece then anything that springs from another civilization is of lesser importance. If multicultural narratives are to be respected then the educational system has to prepare the way by making sure that it paints a more accurate picture of itself by giving recognition to all the facets of knowledge Western civilization gained from others. Students will then be more inclined to respect the narratives of all cultures and not view them as quaint exotic tales. This will be the case because our official academic curricula will be a more accurate representation of the history of the part the various peoples of the world played in the development of our current pool of knowledge and achievements. In addition to this citizens who make up the various cultures of a pluralistic society will be able to contribute to public speech with a greater sense of equality and democratic acceptance. Charles Taylor (1992) states:

Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm; can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being (Taylor 1992: 25).

Taylor points out that some feminists have been arguing that women who live in patriarchal societies have been pressured into adopting a depreciatory image of themselves. This, according to Taylor, has happened to such an extent that "they have internalized a picture of their own inferiority." The result of this is that even when some of the objective obstacles to their improvement are removed, they may still be incapable of making adequate

use of any opportunities that may be afforded them; and Taylor adds: "Beyond this, they are condemned to suffer the pain of low self-esteem" (Taylor, 1992: 25-26). For equal democratic conversation to take place in the public arena, citizens must have a sense of respect for one another and also for themselves. Consequently our educational system must do its best to encourage this.

Taylor discusses the reach of this matter of non-recognition and misrecognition as stretching beyond the circle of feminist concerns:

An analogous point has been made in relation to blacks: that white society has for generations projected a demeaning image of them, which some of them have been unable to resist adopting. Their own self-depreciation, in this view, becomes one of the most potent instruments of their own oppression. Their first task ought to be to purge themselves of this imposed and destructive identity (Taylor, 1992: 26).

Taylor continues in this stream and indicates that this problem extends to all peoples who have been subjected by colonial expansionism. He asserts:

Recently a similar point has been made in relation to indigenous and colonized people in general. It is held that since 1492, Europeans have projected an image of such people as some how inferior, uncivilized, and through the force of conquest have often been able to impose this image on the conquered (Taylor, 1992: 26).

Taylor insists: "With these perspectives, misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (Taylor, 1992:26). In other words, it may be said that lack of proper recognition is both unjust and unloving.

Richard Rorty (1986) acknowledges that Europeans have generally been of the opinion that their culture is superior to all others. For Rorty, this is so because of the Western view that Cartesian rationality puts Western culture on a plane above all others.

What Cartesian philosophy seemed to do was to give us a way of showing that, in the sight of some power not ourselves, according to some criteria which were “human” rather than merely local and historical, our culture was preferable to others. As I see it, the way to overcome the last vestiges of the Cartesian period in philosophy, to finish the encapsulation of that period, is to find a way of praising our belief system, the system characteristic of us liberal Europeans, which will not involve the claim that the world-view of twentieth- century European liberals mirrors nature, or is a better expression of a trans-cultural a-historical human faculty called “reason.” My own hunch about how to do this, is roughly, to de-emphasize science and emphasize art (Rorty, 1986: 190).

Rorty wants to find a way of praising European culture without being arrogant. He wishes to see “the Greek miracle” as placing Europeans on a path of “aesthetic bliss” rather than one of scientific exactitude. He wants to take a humbler path in honouring this “miracle.” Rorty’s project is monocultural. Our project, on the contrary, is multicultural, multicultural in that it is underscoring the necessity of giving recognition to all those from other cultures who have contributed to the establishment of Western culture. This call for recognizing the validity of the cultures and civilizations of all peoples of the world is a just and loving necessity. It is necessary for the overcoming of dominance: for democratic societies to be more accepting of

the multicultural narratives of their pluralistic citizens and communities – for the citizens of democracies to be equitably respectful of the cultures and narratives of the various peoples making up their society. It is the kind of project that contributes to the cultural and educational foundation for the development of an overlapping consensus on moral issues. It undercuts the Smithian ethic of self-interest that depends upon a nebulous “invisible hand” to create fairness out of the competitive jungle of warring self-interests (Smith [1776] 1802, vol. 2:181). The recognition of the contribution of the various peoples of the world to the development of our modern pool of knowledge can make citizens more ready to listen to and respect multicultural narratives. This respect is necessary if an overlapping consensus is to be established in the moral arena. This is the point at which multiculturalism, our overall curriculum and moral education intersect. It challenges Western civilization to re-examine its narrative that tells a story that all true knowledge began at Greece. It also challenges Western civilization to give proper recognition to the scholars and the documents of Africa, Asia and the Ancient Americas that formed the seedbed and fertilization for the growth of western civilization, and continuously contributes to the structure of global knowledge. Respect for the dignity of all humans requires that we desist from the Aristotelian and American revolutionary attitude of reserving equality and recognition for a chosen elite (Aristotle, Bk. III, ch.5; Davis, 1975: 164-167). This respect also requires that plagiarism be rejected not only at the *personal academic level* but also at the *cultural and historical level*. Cultural plagiarism is immoral. Due recognition must be given for knowledge gained from others. It is a historical fact that a great deal of non-European material has been infused into Western civilization. We need to give proper recognition to this in our schools. If we refuse to do so, we shall be condoning at the historical and cultural level

what we despise at the personal academic level. It is with this in mind that we shall now reflect upon a few of the achievements of Asia and Africa in their historic civilizations, and also comment upon a few of the contributions of Asia and Africa to the development of Western civilization and upon the moral importance of giving due recognition to these achievements and contributions by incorporating them into our present day school curricula

### **5.1 The Multicultural Approach**

A vivid pictorial example of this is illustrated by the work of Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). Picasso's painting, "Les demoiselles d'Avignon" is recognized as a pivotal piece in the birth of modern art in the western world. " The painting represented the beginning of Cubism, a new pictorial language that Picasso was to continue elaborating and perfecting until 1925"

(*Encyclopaedia Britannica (1983) Micropaedia VII*, 987). Horst W. Janson (1977) says:

When Picasso started the picture, it was to be a temptation scene in a brothel, but he ended up with a composition of five nudes and still life ... The three on the left are angular distortions of classical figures, but the violently dislocated features and bodies of the other two have all the barbaric qualities of primitive art (Janson 1977. 653).

Robert Hughes (1991) is a little more respectful. He points out that Picasso's work involved an "appropriation of forms and motifs from African art." Hughes contends that Picasso and his contemporaries had no real interest in the significance of African art: "In this respect, Cubism was like a dainty parody of the imperial model. The African carvings were an exploitable resource, like copper or palm oil, and Picasso's use of them was a kind of cultural plunder (Hughes, 1991: 20). Hughes believes that this was the case because Europeans had run out of



artistic ideas. He states:

To depict the monuments of Easter Island, as William Hodges did, was one thing; to imitate their style, quite another. Yet this was what Picasso did with his African prototypes, around 1906-8. When he began to parody black art, he was stating what no eighteenth-century artist would have ever imagined suggesting that the tradition of the human figure, which had been the very spine of western art for two and a half millennia, had at last run out; and that in order to renew its vitality, one had to look to untapped cultural resources - the Africans, remote in their otherness (Hughes, 1991: 21).

Hughes maintains: "Picasso looked to his masks as emblems of savagery, of violence transferred into the sphere of culture" (Hughes, 1991: 21). I wonder whether Hughes is giving us the impression that Picasso did really not respect African art; his implication is that Picasso's attitude towards his African mentors was akin to that of Janson's - their work was barbaric.

This negative picture of Picasso's attitude towards African art is not accurate. Dorota Kozinzka (1998) gives an account of Esther Dagan's encounter with Picasso, which seems to indicate a different Picasso from the one painted by Hughes. Kozinzka writes:

The Paris encounter with African dance troupes was not the only one that awakened Dagan's passion for things African. While there, she often wrote articles for Israeli newspapers, and one of them commissioned an interview with Picasso. In his atelier, she was awe struck by the many African masks the great painter collected. Masks unlike anything she's ever seen. "There was little knowledge about Africa in those days," she said. "What is this?" I asked him "Why do you have it?" I didn't understand. Picasso's response is etched in her memory: "The African art has magic in it that we in the West lost a long time ago" (*The Montreal Gazette* 1998, February 14: J1).

Here, Picasso shows respect for what he has learnt from Africa. Traditional African art has played an important role in the development of modern art of Western culture. Modern art is cross-cultural.

## **5.2 The Cross-Fertilization of Cultures**

This cross-fertilization of cultures in the development of Western civilization is not restricted to art. It took place in other disciplines as well. Moreover, there were even cases where European discoveries were anticipated by other cultures, often quite unknown to Europeans. Europe and her children did not possess a monopoly on inventiveness and advanced intelligence. For example, W. T. Sedgwick and H. W. Tyler (1917) declare:

Greece and its civilization seem immeasurably closer to us both in time and in spirit than do ancient Babylonia and Egypt. In these more remote civilizations science had been cultivated chiefly as a tool, either for immediate practical conservative priesthood. In Greece, on the other hand, for the first time in the history of our race, human thought achieved freedom, and real science became possible (Sedgwick and Tyler, 1917: 35- 36).

Sedgwick and Tyler are clearly propagating the Eurocentric view of the development of science based upon the alleged superiority –even sublimity-of Greece.

With regard to the influence of Asia on Europe, Donald F. Lach (1977) acknowledges that a multiplicity of imports came from Asia into Europe; nevertheless, according to Lach, these imports made no important contribution to the development of technology in Europe. His view is that these commodities were merely curious devices and marketable products. European collectors and writers were concerned about "Asian

humanity, flora, and fauna rather than with devices." Lach declares:

Such an observation leads to the conclusion that the Europeans, while standing in awe of Chinese craftsmanship, felt that they had little left to learn from the East about basic tools and contrivances. The only European invention of the century for which there is firm genetic relationship to an Asian prototype is the sailing chariot of Simon Stevin (1548-1620) (Lach, 1977: 401). This was the same kind of scholarly opinion that Joseph Needham (1981) encountered when he embarked on a project of investigating the history of science in China. He informs us that when he started out on his research his sinological friends in Cambridge did not believe he would find anything of consequence. Needham says: "They even doubted whether Chinese culture had ever had any science, technology, or medicine significant for the world (Needham, 1981: 3-4). He adds:

Only after I got to China did I find everywhere scientists, doctors, and engineers who themselves took a great interest in the history of their own subjects in their own ideographic culture, and they proved ready and willing to indicate to me what were the most important Chinese books which should be purchased and studied. The result was the opening up of a veritable goldmine, a cornucopia which would have surprised all the older sinologists, as indeed it surprised me, and perhaps also the classical Chinese scholars too (Needham, 1981:4).

Though he is not as forthright as Needham, Lach admits that the technological superiority of Renaissance Europe had, "to a degree," "resulted from the earlier borrowings of Europe from the East" (Lach, 1977: 400). Needham, on the other hand, though he insists that

"modern science originated in Europe and in Europe only," acknowledges that "it was built upon a foundation of medieval science and technology much of which was non-European" (Needham, 1969: 56). . Needham maintains that before the fourteenth century Europe received rather than gave to Asia, "especially in the field of technology" (Needham, 1969: 177).

Following the scholarship of Needham, Robert K. G. Temple (1986) discusses and illustrates the array of inventions and discoveries for which the Chinese were responsible. These include paper, lacquer, the wheelbarrow, the sliding calipers, metal stirrups, porcelain, paper money and the spinning wheel, to name just a few discussed in the book. Temple informs us: "Wallpaper was brought to Europe from China in the fifteenth Century by French missionaries" (Temple, 1986: 83). He also highlights a number of specific contributions the Chinese made to endocrinology (127), immunology (137), mathematics (140-143), hydraulics (196-197), marine and military technology (186-248).

B.V. Subbarayappa and N. Mukunda (1995) pulled together a number of highly technical articles dealing with this very issue of the achievements and contribution of India to the world's store of knowledge. Their work, *Science in the west and India*, is a compilation of papers presented at the Summer School on the History and Philosophy of Science in July, 1990 at Bangalore, India, organized by the Centre for Theoretical Studies of the Indian Institute of Science and the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research. It deals with disciplines such as mathematics, metallurgy, and medicine. Also, Stanley Wolpert (1997) reminds us that "the use of cotton is one of India's major gifts to world civilization" (19).

Current scholarship is re-establishing the fact that the ancient African civilizations of Egypt and Nubia contributed to the formation Greek civilization. Martin

Bernal (2001) indicates that "Pythagorean" triangles were in use in the Near East more than one thousand before the time of Pythagoras. Moreover: "The volumes of the pyramids were measured almost equally early, long before the time of Eudoxus, who according to Archimedes, was the first person to do so. Furthermore, Archimedes's balanced scales and screw were in use in Egypt centuries before the Greek scientist was born" (Bernal, 2001: 393). Martin Bernal asserts: "No one before 1600 seriously questioned either the belief that Greek civilization and philosophy derived from Egypt, or that the chief ways in which they had been transmitted were through Egyptian colonization of Greece and later Greek study in Egypt" (Bernal, 1987: 121). He then quotes Giordano Bruno: "We Greeks owe Egypt, the grand monarchy of letters and nobility, to be the parent of our fables, metaphors and doctrines" (Bernal, 1987: 153). Cheikh Anta Diop (1989), Ivan Van Sertima (1989), John Pappademos (1989) all cite specific examples of the antecedence of Egyptian learning in fields such as mathematics, astronomy and medicine (Van Sertima, 1989: 69, 78, 80, 94). The story of Africa's achievements and contributions is long. One can also make mention of ancient Nubia and the culture of Meroe, which scholars are now recognizing as having played an important part in the history of ancient Egypt.

Africa's conquest of the Iberian peninsular, and the Moorish empire which was subsequently established there, is another part of the historical saga of the African stimulus to European civilization. The articles appearing in the work edited by Ivan Van Sertima (1993), *Golden age of the Moor*, are ample proof of this. Edward Scobie (1993), in his article, *The Moors and Portugal's global expansion*, makes reference to the Moors' role in the civilizing of Europe. He states:

These same African (Moorish) conquerors civilized backward Spain and Portugal.

The court of the Moorish rulers at Cordoba became the center of culture. Art, learning, refinement and elegance marked the reign of these African conquerors. Commerce flourished. Mathematics, science and medicine found their way through the cultural darkness of Spain. This same cultural enlightenment was taken to Portugal by the conquering Moors of Africa (Scobie, 1993 in Van Sertima: 340).

The influence of the Moors spread into France through conquest and into Britain through the activities of Moorish knights and nobles who had migrated to the British Isles. Scobie discusses the legacy of the Moors in Britain represented not only by historical documents but also by the many British noble families whose coat of arms bear the faces of black Africans (Scobie, 1993 in Van Sertima: 341- 347). These are the kinds of issues that occasioned the article of Sandra Harding (1994), *Is science multicultural? challenges, resources, opportunities, uncertainties*. Harding rejects the Eurocentricity of Western civilization's narrative especially in the area of science. She calls for recognition of the knowledge of other cultures. She insists that science is to be viewed as a multicultural entity and not as the domain of Westerners (Harding, 1994 in Goldberg: 344-370). What we have discussed in the field of the natural sciences may also be done in the fields of psychology, philosophy and the humanities as a whole. We have not even discussed, for example, the area of music and dance.

It is to be noted, as we reflect on this issue, that Mary R. Lefkowitz and Guy Mac Lean Rogers (1996), editors of *Black Athena revisited*, together with other contributors castigate Bernal for being too Afrocentric in his understanding of the roots of Greek civilization. Martin Bernal (2001), in his work *Black Athena writes back*, answers his critics; however, we do not have to get into that debate. Suffice it to quote from Guy Rogers: "The irony (and indeed the tragedy) about the impact that *Black*

*Athena* has made upon the general public is that considerable ancient evidence shows that many different peoples made diverse and complex contributions to the birth of Western civilization over a long period of time” (Rogers, 1996 in Lefkowitz & Rogers: 430). So while he does not agree with the idea that Egyptian civilization laid the foundation for Greek civilization and thus Western civilization, Rogers acknowledges the multicultural nature of the advent of Western culture.

### **5.3 Against Ethnocentrism of All Kinds**

This approach to the history of Western culture is a most critical need. It is one of the most important ways of promoting respect for the peoples of a pluralistic society. By incorporating these kinds of information into our school curricula, we would be undermining the very foundations of racism by giving proper recognition to the contribution the various races of the earth have made towards the development of human civilization. We have to stop being obsessed with the idea of trying to prove that our race is the greatest. There is ample historical evidence that all the races at one time or another have demonstrated greatness in some way or another. Having this disposition is a necessary step towards correcting the backwardness of Eurocentricism, Afrocentrism or any other kind of ethnocentrism which places upon our minds the arrogance that our culture is superior to another's or the bondage that another's is superior to ours. Respect and recognition play a major role in stimulating people to be more open to what others have to offer. If we acknowledge that various peoples of the world have contributed to the formulation of diverse forms of knowledge and the accomplishments of modern civilization, it may encourage us to respect one another better. If we arrogantly assume that another's ethnic group is deficient in intelligence, or in order to protect the self-interests of our ethnic group, and use our power

to obliterate the witness of another's narrative or achievements, our educational system becomes philosophically spurious, unjust and immoral. We end up with a caste system in which the conquered dark skinned founders of the Indus Valley civilization are regarded as worthy only of being slaves (Wolpert, 1997: 14).

Multiculturalism becomes a moral issue in so far as it relates to respect for the various races and the cultures of the world. One way respect can be demonstrated is by making sure that we tell the story of the multicultural composition of Western civilization and of global human achievement. It is a serious act of injustice for any educational curriculum to fail to give proper credit for the contribution the various cultures have made towards the development of the world. If Western civilization fails to give credit and recognition for what it has learnt or acquired from other cultures, it is guilty of cultural plagiarism, one of the most despicable forms of academic immorality. Within the context of Western civilization, cultural plagiarism can give ethnic Europeans the feeling that we did it all by ourselves; that all the worthwhile inventions, science and achievements in the humanities, sprang from the fountain of European genius: they are the exploits of “dead white males” (Postman, 1997: 170 -171). From this attitude it is a logical step to conclude that all other cultures and peoples are of a lower order of mental development. In line with Aristotelian logic, such people are fit only to serve their superior masters, innately incapable, as they deem them to be, of functioning as responsible citizens (Aristotle, Book III, ch. 5). If, on the other hand, we honestly recognize the contribution the several peoples of the world have made towards the development of modern knowledge, this would foster greater respect among all ethnic groups – and here “ethnic” obviously includes Whites.

This then is an important aspect of the moral model multicultural education can provide for our pedagogical system, not only for pluralistic societies but also indeed for



the world at large. It is a model that calls for the equitable weaving of the threads of the global multicultural story into the warp and woof of our curricula at all levels. It is the necessary prerequisite, the necessary cultural and academic milieu out of which an egalitarian, multicultural conversation can take place so that an overlapping consensus on moral questions can be established.

## CHAPTER 6

### TRADITIONAL COUNCILS: A STRUCTURE FOR THE FACILITATING OF OVERLAPPING CONSENSUS

An aspect of what has been said about the arts and the sciences in the preceding chapter can also be said about democracy itself. The democratic impulse is not merely a Western concept, especially as it relates to the council system of decision-making. Consequently, the promoting of the traditional council system as a complement to the parliamentary system can facilitate the building of overlapping consensus in pluralistic societies. Consensus is a concept that has a wide tradition that criss-crosses several cultures of the world. Schools can therefore encourage students to study their own particular cultural and political traditions to identify democratic precedents in those traditions. This will enable students to identify themselves with and contribute, with a greater sense of belonging, to the democratic well-being of society. The promoting of the council system can occur not only in schools, but also in the local community associations. Schools can teach the council system just as they teach the parliamentary system. Educational institutions can encourage students to participate in council societies just as they take part in debating societies. Local community associations can be encouraged to use the council system of deliberation especially when discussing issues that concern public morality.

Steven Muhlberger and Phil Paine (1993) argue very convincingly that the practice of various forms of democracy is a universal phenomenon and that this is most often the case at the local level in the form of councils. Although they point out that

several of these democratic practices fall far behind the modern concept of democracy, they acknowledge that these practices do indicate that the ideas of democracy are by no means the sole domain of the West: "It is commonly thought that most people in the world have no democratic experience, and that the democratic idea is fundamentally alien to most human cultures. This is what lies behind the catchphrase, 'the western concept of democracy'" (Muhlberger & Paine, 1993:25).

### **6.1 Assemblies and Councils**

According to Muhlberger and Paine, most human governments have been administered by assemblies and councils. Such groups are "relevant to the story of democracy" (Muhlberger & Paine, 1993: 27).

In China, for example: "Under most emperors, the ordinary people of China have had a firm network of local institutions that administered local affairs and protected them from the worst predations of the central authorities. Some of these local institutions embodied a considerable degree of democratic practice" (28, 29). This democratic impulse is evident in the administration of the traditional Chinese village. In the ancestral halls, clans ran their affairs through a form of democratic arrangement. Muhlberger and Paine inform us that though these halls were different in their political structure, they generally had an executive council composed of twelve male officers, elected annually by the men of the community. While the ancestral halls attended to matters related to the clan, the village temple concerned itself with matters related to the whole community: "policing, the maintenance of roads, canals, and landing places; schooling, if the clans were not providing this service; public relief work; and the provision of an annual festival, including theatrical or operatic performances". All of these responsibilities were

administered by councillors selected annually by a system of rotation from among the male householders. These councillors governed with the advice of a selected body of respected elders and educated men. Though these governing bodies were not ideal democracies, they did demonstrate what can be called the “democratic impulse,” so that “the concrete local experience of self government by the Chinese people can be compared to that of Europeans over the centuries” (29 - 31).

According to Muhlberger and Paine, Africa also provides us with traditional examples of democratic practice: “Precolonial Africa was a latticework of decentralized farming villages and autonomous towns only occasionally subjected to genuine monarchical states” (32). Among the Sebei of Uganda, all the villagers were eligible to attend the assembly called the *kokwet*. Every circumcised male was qualified to speak at the gathering. At a more broad based level, the Aguinyi people – a subdivision of the Ibo of Nigeria – also exemplify democratic principles. The Aguinyi is “an acephalous confederation of seven autonomous towns:”

Although the confederation has no institutional expression, each of the towns is run by a council of delegates elected from villages that make up the towns. Each village has an assembly in which everyone may speak, and which is responsible for roads, scholarship schemes, revolving loan funds, and (even in modern conditions) basic law and order. Below the village level, both wards and extended families deal with common business on much the same basis as the villages themselves. Life among the Aguinyi thus embraces a variety of democratic experience (Muhlberger & Paine, 1993: 33).

The Aguiyi have within the psychology of their culture what Muhlberger and Paine call “an individualist democratic ethic” that undergirds their political practice. People are expected to stand up for the views they hold even if they are in disagreement with the rest of the community; yet at the same time they are expected to accept political defeat without bitterness. Muhlberger and Paine argue that the large states that existed in Africa in the past tended to undermine the authority of the local councils by installing “paramount chiefs and centrally directed headmen.” They contend that the colonial empires followed that subjugatory policy and that contemporary dictators are no better (34).

## 6.2 Councils: A Foundation for Democracy

India can be cited as another historical example where the practice of democracy is found. Muhlberger and Paine argue that India’s role in the history of democracy is significant: “In India, as in Greece, democracy – in the ancient sense- was commonplace. The democratic thought produced by an environment characterized by democratic practice is still accessible through the ancient literature of the subcontinent” (34, 35). According to Muhlberger and Paine, these democratic forms of government, existed before the Brahmins imposed their rigid caste system upon India. These democratic communities flourished during the period of about 600B.C: “Communities both small and large organized themselves as gatherings of equals, taking collective actions through unanimous decision, voting, or both. Such organizations were called *sanghas* or *ganas*” (35). This spirit of egalitarianism, according to Muhlberger and Paine, was most prominent within the ancient Buddhist communities. Within these communities decision-making was done through unanimity, majority rule was used only when unanimity broke

down. From the period of the Buddha until the invasion of Alexander the Great during the span of 327 to 325 B.C., there existed in India republics of various sizes, including large federal republics. These federal republics were the dominant feature of Indian political life. According to Muhlberger and Paine, it was Alexander's conquest and his support of monarchical rule that tipped the scales against republicanism (35 – 37).

Features of the democratic tradition continued in India right up to relatively modern times. Muhlberger and Paine point out that during the nineteenth century grass roots democracy within India intrigued British observers and also inspired Indian nationalists in their struggle against British imperialism. They also note that during the twentieth century efforts to re-establish the village *panchayat* have become an important foundation for the programme to democratize Indian society thoroughly (38, 39).

### **6.3 North American Democratic Traditions**

Within the North American context, we may note particularly the democratic traditions of the New England states and of the First Nations. The self-governing towns of early New England are political landmarks in the history of democracy in North America. Alexis de Tocqueville (1848), in his classic work, *Democracy in America*, makes a number of striking observations about the development of democracy in New England which are worthy of note. He declares:

In England the nucleus of the Puritan movement continued to be the middle classes, and it was from those classes that most of the emigrants sprang. The population of New England grew fast, and while in their homeland men were still despotically divided by class hierarchies, the colony came more and more to present the novel phenomenon of a society homogeneous in all its parts.

Democracy more perfect than any of which antiquity had dared to dream sprang full grown and fully armed from the midst of the old feudal society...

The English colonies – and that was one of the main reasons for their prosperity – have always enjoyed more internal freedom and political independence than those of other nations; nowhere was this principle of liberty applied more completely than in the states of New England (De Tocqueville, [1848] 1969: 39).

De Tocqueville observes that there were three main forms of colonial government which existed in the British domains at the time. First, the monarch chose a governor to rule the colony in the name of the monarch and under his direct orders; De Tocqueville notes that this was the system of colonial rule employed by the rest of Europe. In the second instance, the sovereign granted ownership of a territory to an individual or to a company; in such an event the civil and political jurisdiction of the territory was vested in the hands of a single individual or those of a company, and this person or group of persons sold the land and ruled the inhabitants under the authority and supervision of the Crown. Then: “Under the third system a number of immigrants were given the right to form a political society under the patronage of the motherland and allowed to govern themselves in any way not contrary to her laws. This mode of colonization, so favourable to liberty, was put into practice only in New England” (De Tocqueville [1848] 1969: 40). The New England model of democracy is represented supremely by the town hall meeting. A town hall meeting, in the historical New England context, is a meeting of citizens to enact laws and determine policy to govern themselves. In an editorial of *Northern News Online* entitled “Welcome back to town hall democracy,” the paper states:

Among the most abused phrases in the modern language of democracy is “town hall meeting.” The words refer, in their original sense, to a meeting of citizens – before the notion of elected represented had even been invented – to make laws and distribute taxes. It is an honourable tradition that can trace its roots to the early days of the United States, but one that has fallen into disuse. Only a few small towns in New England still hold true town hall meetings, and few of them are well attended....How refreshing, then, to see four Yellowknife MLAs offer to listen to the thoughts of their constituents on the draft constitution this past Tuesday. And how refreshing it was to see more than 150 of those constituents give up their regular Tuesday night television, curling or cocktails in favour of talking politics. Now that was a town hall meeting (November 08, 1996).

Of course the paper exaggerated a bit; for this modern Yellowknife meeting was not a legislative body as the historical assembly was; but at least it does demonstrate that it is possible for citizens to meet and seek to arrive at some consensus on matters of common concern.

This spirit of democracy was also evident among the First Nations of North America. James Adair (1775) in his classic work, *The history of the American Indians*, speaks of the democratic practices of the Chickasaw, Cherokee and Choctaw Indians of the U.S.A. Adair notes that the culture was a culture of egalitarianism:

The Indians, therefore, have no such titles or persons, as emperors, or kings; nor an appellative for such, in any of their dialects. Their highest title, either in military or civil life, signifies only a Chieftain: they have no words to express



despotic power, arbitrary kings, oppressed, or obedient subjects (Adair, [1775] 2005: 415).

One of the ways this culture of egalitarianism was demonstrated was in the practice of freedom of speech. Indians expressed themselves freely concerning the political affairs of their community. Adair claims that every man's voice had equal weight in public debate. Their towns were independent and only formed unions by free consent. Adair even notes that their method of debates in their councils was very cultured and dignified. Adair notes: "In all their stated orations they have a beautiful modest way of expressing their dislike of ill things. They only say, "it is not good, goodly, or commendable." And their whole behaviour, on public occasions, is highly worthy of imitation by some of our British senators and lawyers" (Adair [1775] 2005: 416). This comment is to be noted when one observes that Adair still considered the Indians to be "uncivilized" and "savages" (Adair, [1775] 2005:364, 366).

Gene Weltfish (1965) discusses the democratic traditions of the Pawnees of the U.S.A. One outstanding democratic trait of the Pawnees, according to Weltfish, was their democratic self motivation. Individuals sought the interests of the community in response to suggestions or the recognition of a need:

Even more startling to me than the contrast in home life was the question of political control among the Pawnees. They were a well disciplined people, maintaining public order under many trying circumstances. And yet they had none of the power mechanisms that we consider essential to a well-ordered life. No orders were ever issued. No assignments for work were ever made nor were over all plans discussed. There was no code of rules of conduct, nor punishment for

infraction. There were no commandments, nor moralizing proverbs. The only instigator of action was the consenting person (Weltfish, 1965: 5).

Weltfish admits that the basis of this peculiar disposition of the Pawnees was very elusive (Weltfish, 1965: 7). She even admits that the kind of individualism practiced by the Pawnees was not part of her own culture:

Time after time I tried to find a case of orders given, and there was none. Gradually I began to realize that democracy is a very personal thing which like charity, begins at home. Basically it means not being coerced and having no need to coerce anyone else. The Pawnee learned this way of living in the earliest beginnings of his life. In the detailed events of everyday living as a child, he began his development as a disciplined and free man or woman who felt her dignity and her independence to be inviolate (Weltfish, 1965: 6).

Weltfish then says: "I was often confronted with the feeling that they expected of me a kind of independence and decisiveness that was not considered becoming to a woman in our society. Men and women expected the same clear and well defined reaction from me; and among themselves it was evident that it was their accustomed mode of interacting (6). Weltfish notes that decisions were made by consensus. The chiefs were simply the focus of consensus and consequently did not make arbitrary decisions. Public opinion was an important factor in the exercise of governance.

One other example of this democratic impulse among the First Nations, is the case of the Huron. Bruce G. Trigger (1987) takes particular note of the system of councils and the tradition of consensus among the ancient Huron. His work is a history of the Huron to 1660. Government among the Huron of Canada existed at four main levels: the clan

segment, the village, the tribe and the confederacy. The council of each clan segment was composed of the heads of each family. They chose two headmen from among themselves to be their leaders. One was their civic leader; the other their military leader. The village council was composed of the civic clan leaders and as such they spoke on the behalf of their clan at council meetings. This council also included the elders of the clans. One of the headmen of the clans was generally recognized as the spokesman for the entire village; but he did not have political authority over the individual clans. The tribal council, according to Trigger, included all of the civic headmen of each of the tribal villages (Trigger, 1987: 54-59). This feature of communities establishing councils appears in various cultures.

Almost all villages, everywhere, have had a village council. These have had many names: the ancient *tings* of Scandinavia, the *kampong* assemblies of Malaysia, the famous council fires of the Amerindian confederacies, the communes of the vill of medieval England, the *gumlao* of the Kachin in Burma, the *kokwet* of the East African Sebei, the *panchayats* of India, and countless others. Voluntary self-help groups have also been commonplace and decision making within them has necessarily been by discussion and general agreement (Muhlberger and Paine, 1993: 32).

This spirit of democracy has had possibly its most outstanding North American precedent in the League of the Iroquois, a confederacy of Indian nations, which some scholars contend provided the historical model for the federal government of the United States of America. Jack Weatherford (1988) argues that while the European enlightenment ideas of democracy certainly did influence the thinking of the American founding fathers, it was

the Iroquois form of government and social egalitarianism that gave the U.S. a model upon which to base its governmental structure. Weatherford identifies Benjamin Franklin as the important link in this cross over. Weatherford informs us that Benjamin Franklin first became acquainted with the operation of Indian political organization in his position of government printer for the colony of Pennsylvania. This responsibility required him to print the records and speeches of the several Indian assemblies and treaty documents. According to Weatherford, Franklin extended his interest to include the study of Indian culture and institutions. Benjamin Franklin eventually became Pennsylvania's commissioner for Indian affairs. Weatherford states: "He held this post during the 1750s and became intimately familiar with the intricacies of Indian political culture and in particular with the League of the Iroquois" (Weatherford, 1988: 136). As early as 1744, the Iroquois chief Canassatego had advised the British to form a union of their colonies similar to that of the Iroquois. The Iroquois were finding it difficult to negotiate with so many different colonies. It was not until 1754 at the Albany Congress that an attempt was made to do so. This proposed federation was not a drive for independence but rather was a system designed for the security and defence of the British colonies. Benjamin Franklin was the principal author of the Albany Plan of Union. Bruce Burton (1986) states:

After much debate the Albany Plan of Union, so striking in its democratic character, was unanimously approved. The representational character of this One General Government, with its observance of the Rights of the individual colonies, wherein most power was vested in its Grand Council (notwithstanding the approval of the Crown in its deliberations,) is in its purpose and structure striking in its resemblance to the political structure of the League of Six Nations at whose

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repeated insistence for the preservation of both Indian and Colonial interests something like it be formed (Burton, 1986: 8).

The British king rejected the plan, apparently because of its radical democratic nature. Burton argues that the Albany Plan of Union spearheaded by Benjamin Franklin and inspired by the constitutional structure and principles of The League of the Iroquois, was the prototype of the U.S. Constitution (Burton, 1986:9). “The evidence is clear that both the idea and practice of democracy are foreign to no part of the world; in fact, it is commonplace for people to make important political decisions in cooperation with their equals” (Muhlberger and Paine, 1993: 28). The fostering of the council system of discussion and deliberation is possibly the best means of facilitating the development of an overlapping consensus on issues of morality confronting our communities. The establishing of community councils to discuss topics affecting our society can be the structure that can be put in place to promote the formation of overlapping consensus. This can be a very effective means of developing the kind of deliberative or discursive democracy that is a feature of Rawls’s system.

#### **6.4 Discursive Democracy**

The call for an overlapping consensus is a call that represents a deliberative or discursive approach to democracy. John Dryzek points out:

Around 1990 the theory of democracy took a definite deliberative turn. Prior to that turn, the democratic ideal was seen mainly in terms of aggregation of preferences or interests into collective decisions through devices such as voting and representation. Under deliberative democracy, the essence of democratic legitimacy should be sought instead in the ability of all individuals subject to a

collective decision to engage in authentic deliberation about that decision. These individuals should accept the decision only if it could be justified to them in convincing terms (Dryzek, 2000: v).

A discursive approach to democracy falls right within the ambit of the council tradition – a tradition in which democratic decisions are made by consensus rather than by adversarial voting. It is to be noted as we discuss this issue that John Dryzek (2000) argues that in a pluralistic society consensus is unattainable. Dryzek says this, rejecting Rawls's call for overlapping consensus: "Consensus is by definition unanimous agreement not just on a course of action, but also on the reasons for it... In a pluralistic world, consensus is unattainable, unnecessary and undesirable. More feasible and attractive are workable agreements in which participants agree on a course of action, but for different reasons" (Dryzek, 170). Here it is obvious that Dryzek has misread Rawls. He rejects Rawls, yet paradoxically concurs with him. What Dryzek calls "workable agreements" are precisely what Rawls calls "overlapping consensus." According to Rawls overlapping consensus does not require us to make our judgements for identical reasons. On the contrary, in the exclusive view of public reason citizens argue from the premise of their own private, comprehensive doctrines even though in the public arena the basis for justification of these views is the constitution. In the inclusive view of public reason of the Rawls-Greenawalt sort, citizens argue also from the premise of their varying comprehensive doctrines but may, with discretion, appeal to these comprehensive doctrines in public discussion. In the model of overlapping consensus citizens agree on courses of action for different personal reasons – reasons based upon their comprehensive doctrines.

Councils are excellent means of stimulating these kinds of discussions. Nelson Mandela (1994) speaks of how the council tradition of the Xhosa people of South Africa influenced his understanding of the democratic process. Mandela writes:

Everyone who wanted to speak did so. It was democracy in its purest form. There may have been a hierarchy of importance among the speakers, but everyone was heard, chief and subject, warrior and medicine man, shopkeeper and farmer, landowner and laborer. People spoke without interruption and the meetings lasted for many hours. The foundation of self government was that all men were free to voice their opinions and equal in their value as citizens. (Women, I am afraid were deemed second class citizens)...I observed how some speakers used emotion and dramatic language, and tried to move the audience with such techniques, while other speakers were sober and even, and shunned emotion.

At first, I was astonished by the vehemence – and candor - with which people criticized the regent. He was not above criticism – in fact, he was often the principal target of it. But no matter how flagrant the charge, the regent simply listened, not defending himself, showing no emotion at all. The meeting would continue until some kind of consensus was reached...Only at the end of the meeting, as the sun was setting, would the regent speak. His purpose was to sum up what had been said and form some consensus among the diverse opinions. But no conclusion was forced on people who disagreed. If no agreement could be reached, another meeting would be held (Mandela, 1994: 21, 22).

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Councils are excellent fora for the encouragement of democratic discussion in pluralistic societies. In the council tradition, the process of conversation is more amenable to public discussion than formal debate. Jaida N'ha Sandra (1997) points out:

In the European conversational tradition, one person offers a remark. The next person picks up where the first left off – by agreeing, adding more detail and clarification, providing a related comment or experience, or arguing a contrary view. By contrast, in the process called “council,” one person speaks for a while, and then there is a period of silence. The next person’s remarks may pertain to the same topic, but they are not necessarily related to the content of the previous speaker’s comments. Each participant in a council is expected to hold a piece of the truth; only when each has contributed can the whole truth be discovered.

There is, therefore, little debating or weighing of pros and cons in most traditional councils (Sandra, 1997: 171).

Councils are fine systems for pluralistic societies to encourage. Citizens can find opportunity to express their views in all the cultural variety existing in the community. Furthermore, if citizens can identify these democratic council precedents within their own cultural traditions then the culture of democracy is strengthened. We can promote the council method of deliberation in townships, boroughs and villages. We can encourage clubs and all kinds of community groups to use it. Children can be encouraged to practise the process in schools. For example, teachers can encourage students to make decisions about matters of common interest to their class using the council system. The council method can be applicable in even more critical issues. Maxine Greene argues:



At a time of major tensions among groups and moral systems, no educator is in a position to impose designs for harmonizing clashing interests. In his school, for example, the teacher may propose resolutions when racial groups are fighting with each other; he may, in time of dire emergency, suppress conflict by force. But it appears to be immoral, at this time, to decide for any individual or group what is fair, decent, or humane (Greene, 1973: 273).

With the use of the council method, the teacher can also provide a forum for students to discuss their differences and seek to find an overlapping consensus as to how these differences can be addressed or even possibly resolved.

The council method of deliberation also creates a comfortable environment for the telling of stories as part of the decision-making process. The council system is ideal for the practice of narrative. Children can feel comfortable to use stories to convey their points of view if they are more prone to think pictorially than propositionally. These narratives enable children develop a sense of acceptance and recognition when they realize that their stories are respected. Children will be able to develop their public speaking skills more easily if the deliberation process allows them the freedom to include their narratives.

If we follow this path, the multicultural nature of Canada can be a fertile seedbed for the development of consensus as we seek to develop moral principles in our democracy. The various peoples that make up the Canadian mosaic can find within their own history and culture instances of democratic practice that can provide a familiar precedent that can stimulate a culture of overlapping consensus among us. This is even more canadianly attractive when one thinks about the fact that we have the democratic

precedent of the First Nations, in addition to that of European tradition, as a cultural and political heritage from which we can draw.

## 6.5

## Conclusions

Current methods of moral education and moral deliberation are not adequate for meeting the challenge of determining what public moral principles we should abide by in pluralistic democracies. These methods tend to be based upon achieving the goals of the dominant cultural group that are generally expressions of comprehensive doctrines. Moral judgements based upon any particular comprehensive doctrine ought not to be used without public consensus to determine principles of public morality.

John Rawls's political idea of an overlapping consensus, with its principles of public speech, is a concept that can be used as a model for conducting moral discourse in the public sphere and for determining the content of moral education. Multicultural narratives can be pictorial examples of moral deliberation. We can use them in moral conversation to enhance the creating of an overlapping consensus. They are also a means of cross-cultural communication. Such narratives can also illustrate the importance of moral perception as a complement to moral reflection in the making of moral decisions for the achieving of consensus.

Citizens need to respect these multicultural narratives as equal contributors to the formation of an overlapping consensus. In order for this to be the case our educational system must include in its curricula the part all the various cultures and peoples played in the development of knowledge and of Western civilization. Closely related to this is the fact that democracy is a universal feature. It exists generally as traditional councils in cultures around the globe. In pluralistic societies we can teach the council tradition in

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schools and also encourage citizens, especially in local community groups, to use the council method as a means of deliberation on public moral matters. Citizens can also study their own particular cultural history to identify instances of democratic precedents. This can enable citizens to have a stronger connection to the democratic process as they seek to establish an overlapping consensus on questions of public morality.

I offer these perspectives as a contribution to the forging of a new vision in response to the challenge of teaching and deliberating upon questions public morality in contemporary pluralistic democracies. It is a vision that is respectful to our current democratic tradition and yet at the same time it seeks to strengthen the base of that tradition by reaching further into our global, historical, multicultural, educational and narrative roots.

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