



Multicultural citizenship: legacy and critique

edited by Jean-François Caron and François Boucher, London and New York,
Routledge, pp. xiii + 292, \$190 (hbk), ISBN 978-1-03256-498-2

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BOOK REVIEW

Multicultural citizenship: legacy and critique, edited by Jean-François Caron and François Boucher, London and New York, Routledge, pp. xiii + 292, \$190 (hbk), ISBN 978-1-03256-498-2

In 1995, Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka published *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, arguing that certain sorts of rights for minority cultures were consistent with liberal theory. Kymlicka's theorising remains enormously influential, and the volume under review was apparently occasioned by the thirtieth anniversary of his book's appearance. The scarcely four-page introduction by co-editor Jean-François Caron states that the book's purpose is to provide political philosophers an opportunity to 'question some of Kymlicka's findings, to deepen some of them and also to propose solutions to some of the questions that he left opened ever since. In light of these contributions, it is also an opportunity for Kymlicka to reconsider some of his arguments and to recontextualize his theory 39 years later ...' (xiv).

Unfortunately, the introduction does not provide an overview of the chapters or the rationale behind their selection and organisation, nor does it highlight any themes or conclusions. Instead, it raises a few questions of its own, most notably asking if Kymlicka's original arguments may have been overdetermined by the heated context of the 1990s in which Quebec's secession from Canada seemed possible, even probable. Caron counters: is it possible that the better way of finding unity in diversity is not through grand constitutional reforms but rather by 'banal administrative agreements or the usual day-to-day political compromises and bargaining between elites', even though this can even be critiqued as 'somehow "undemocratic"'? (xi). Distracting from these worthwhile lines of inquiry, however, are numerous grammatical and stylistic errors.

The introduction is followed by fourteen chapters. The first two deal with Kymlicka's contribution to political theory most broadly, while most of the others deal with specific issues, including cultural membership, feminism, religious diversity, migration and Indigenous peoples. Interspersed among these are three chapters that discuss Kymlicka's theories in relation to specific geographic contexts (Israel, Catalonia and Iran), while the final chapter is his response.

Rémi Léger's opening chapter subtly points to the limitations of using one book as a focus, pointing out that Kymlicka's normative defence of liberal multiculturalism preceded and continued beyond *Multicultural Citizenship*. Consequently, Léger draws on a broader array of Kymlicka's work to argue that he actually developed four types of normative arguments: the first using liberal theory; the second and third using the nature and political practices of liberal democracies; and the fourth being established on liberal norms codified in international declarations and conventions. Léger concludes that although Kymlicka's work is 'unusual in how it has straddled and moved between different normative sources ... this feature is also what makes his definition and defence of liberal multiculturalism so compelling' (13). The second chapter, by Arjun Tremblay, similarly places *Multicultural Citizenship* in the broader context of Kymlicka's subsequent solo and co-authored works. Tremblay argues that these works launched and sustained an ongoing comparative study of multiculturalism. He demonstrates how, unlike many of multiculturalism's boosters or detractors, Kymlicka's scholarship 'operationalizes multiculturalism, explores multiculturalism as an independent and intervening variable, and that, in discussing the conditions under which multiculturalism is more likely to succeed and survive, examines multiculturalism as a dependent variable' (35).

The critical study of the state of Israel and its policies has long been a third rail in the academy, and perhaps never more so than in the present day, making the inclusion of Raphael Cohen-

Almagor's 'Coercion by the Orthodox Minority in Israel' a brave editorial decision. He argues that not only are the 'power and privileges of the Orthodox religious authorities in Israel ... excessive and unjustified' but also that the contradictions between the liberal and religious worldview in Israel are irreconcilable. The problem is a lack of separation between State and religion and therefore the solution is to 'establish two separate spheres to ensure that liberalism and Judaism will not clash' (103).

Some of the earliest attempts to work out a relationship between liberalism and group rights (Kymlicka's first book and Charles Taylor's essay on recognition, for example), focused on the place of Québec and Indigenous peoples in Canadian society, and not on the broader notion of multiculturalism. Subsequent scholarship largely neglected Indigenous peoples' relationship to the liberal order, and it is only recently that the topic has been revisited. This volume contains two chapters on the subject. Examining the case of Latin America, Sebastián Rudas argues that non-coercive attempts to liberalise national minorities constitute acts of cultural imperialism. Avigail Eisenberg's chapter explores two related tensions in *Multicultural Citizenship* relating to Indigenous peoples, and she outlines four alternatives. Unlike Kymlicka, who sees a place for the state, Eisenberg concludes that the 'failure of states today to resolve colonial injustice is only one of the many reasons to be skeptical about a state-centric and nationalist politics and seek alternatives to it' (272).

The volume concludes with Kymlicka's nine-page essay – whose title, 'Reflections on *Multicultural Citizenship* 25 Years On', suggests it was written in 2020. In it, he explains the context in which he wrote the book and compares it to the present, noting that he has since 'increasingly come to believe that a *philosophical defense* of minority rights will be unpersuasive unless it is accompanied by a plausible vision of the *politics* of minority rights' (278: italics in the original). He concludes by arguing that the pressing task for the next generation of scholars will be finding a balance between resisting the illegitimate state and creating legitimate democratic political authority in diverse societies that can accomplish things without subordinating minorities.

Despite its brevity, Kymlicka's essay is an insightful assessment of the state of multicultural theorising – one only wishes he had written more. A central weakness of this literature, he argues, is its tendency to diagnose the strengths and limits of liberal multiculturalism without ever presenting possible alternatives. In some ways, the collection is a reflection of this tendency, as it is largely an expensive revisitation of a canonical text instead of a search for new horizons. But perhaps this reflects the particular historical moment, in which – as the old world order crumbles – there is comfort in revisiting some of the successes of the past. Still, looking at this situation more closely would force us to confront the fact that Kymlicka's arguments about the necessity of state-supported multiculturalism and, indeed, multicultural citizenship ring truer than ever.

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