

with enhanced economic growth, has enjoyed accelerated technological development. Bear finds himself in a land without imposed laws, but customs. Everyone carries guns. Everyone is healthy (courtesy of superb medical technology). And property-rights enforcement is carried out by private contractor, of which his alter-ego is one.

The details of how such a society would work are conveyed through the learning process of the first (or 'our') Win Bear, without slowing the pace of a snappy tale. Included in the story, unfortunately in my view, are intelligent monkeys and dolphins, but I suspect that Smith introduced these to make a separate point about 'human' rights. On the other hand, the appendix outlining the significant historical events of 'that' America has some rather amusing points, such as '1865: Actor John Wilkes Booth murdered by obscure Illinois lawyer', and the accession of such people as H. L. Mencken and Ayn Rand to the Presidency.

A later novel by Smith, his 1996 *Pallas*, is more conventionally SF, with a utopian, government-free, hunter-gatherer/industrial society established on an asteroid. A pocket of the asteroid has been reserved for a Stalinist 'utopian' enclave. The contrast of utopias is fascinating, as is the release of productive energy by the main protagonist, who escapes from one to the other. Again Smith's humour is evident. Ayn Rand makes an appearance as a character (under a different name) and, of all people, Shirley Maclaine appears, treated with surprising sympathy but in a way that highlights the inherent contradictions of views of the kind that she holds.

Smith argues that while the case for freedom—economic and otherwise—must continue to be established in an intellectually rigorous way, it needs to be supported by showing how it can work in practice. Smith would be the last to submit his visions as what will actually happen—and Heinlein consistently denied over the decades any unusual prescience on his own part—but as the able writers on market economics continue to build the factual case, the spirit of people needs to be filled with the vision of what is possible.

These novels, and others of their kind, achieve that.

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IP A

Cultural Pluralism: The Case for Benign Neglect

MICHAEL JAMES

Australia's underlying social norms have proved to be powerful agents of social integration. By contrast, official multiculturalism is widely distrusted.

A case where the government 'solution' is most of the problem.

IN 1988, the FitzGerald Report warned that multiculturalism was undermining Australia's immigration programme. The submissions it had received indicated that 'major issues of concern to the community included immigration numbers, composition of the intake and the immigrant's role in changing Australian society. Race did not come through as a major concern'. The report continued:

Confusion and mistrust of multiculturalism, focusing on the suspicion that it drove immigration policy, was very broadly articulated. Many people, from a variety of occupational and cultural backgrounds, perceived it as divisive. The majority of these people also expressed concern about immigrants' commitment to Australia and to Australian principles and institutions.¹

The Hawke Government's response was to cut immigration numbers (as successive governments have continued doing) and to redefine multiculturalism so as to remove any suspicion that it sanctioned the undermining of the nation's social cohesion. The Government's *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*, adopted in 1989, reaffirmed the 'right of all Australians, within carefully defined limits, to express and share their individual cultural heritage, including their language and religion'. The 'limits' were threefold: 'all Australians should have an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia, to its interests and future'; they should 'accept the basic structures and principles of Australian society—the Con-

stitution and the rule of law, tolerance and equality, parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as the national language and equality of the sexes'; and 'the right to express one's own culture and beliefs involves a reciprocal responsibility to accept the right of others to express their own views and values'.²

This restatement has hardly reassured Australians that multiculturalism is not divisive or restored public support for high levels of immigration. Indeed, some influential commentators favour restricting the official use of the term 'multiculturalism'. One of the architects of multiculturalism, Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki, has repudiated any usage for it beyond a description of Australia's demographic reality.³ Paul Kelly has suggested that at the centenary of Federation the country adopts the catchphrase 'Many races, one culture', in preference to the Centenary of Federation Advisory Committee's suggested 'Many cultures, one nation'.⁴ It is quite possible that Prime Minister John Howard's practice of avoiding the term in government statements about Australia's identity and destiny would be followed by any future Labor government.

DOUBTS ABOUT MULTICULTURALISM

What has gone wrong with multiculturalism? The official definition of the policy matters less than the way it is understood by the general public. Paul Kelly holds that multiculturalism is 'widely seen as a policy for Australians from ethnic minority backgrounds, but not for all Australians'. This impression is sustained in

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part by treating all persons from non-English-speaking backgrounds as officially 'disadvantaged' and hence entitled to special treatment regardless of actual need. Equally important, in my judgement, is the way multiculturalism has seemed to question the status of the established culture of the country.

In the decades following World War II, Australia for the first time received hundreds of thousands of immigrants from southern Europe, most of whom settled successfully. But when multiculturalism became official policy in the 1970s, it was, mistakenly or not, widely believed to have implicitly changed the terms on which immigrants are invited to Australia. It suggested that immigrants need not try to adapt to Australia, because Australia will adapt to them, as if Australia were a sort of cultural *terra nullius* in which the residents' way of life had no priority over those that immigrants bring with them, and little of value to which immigrants might aspire. (At one stage, SBS television news gave precise symbolic expression to this idea by regularly projecting an image of Australia as a patchwork of the flags of other countries.) Multiculturalism has thus seemed to stress the differences between people at the expense of the factors that bind them together in a single community. These factors prevent Australia from becoming, say, another Yugoslavia. Yet they are not themselves culturally neutral but are precisely an aspect of the established Australian way of life. To regard 'Anglo-Celtic' culture as just one culture among the many to be found in Australia is thus to overlook its significance as a condition of Australia's successful cultural pluralism.

In practice, the high level of second-generation outmarriage among

ethnic groups⁵ demonstrates that multiculturalism has not led to Australia becoming tribalized, as some of its critics feared it would. On the other hand, widespread outmarriage cannot plausibly be cited as evidence of the success of multiculturalism. High levels of tolerance and intercultural harmony are manifestations of deeper social norms in Australia than anything that recent social engineering could produce.

CULTURES AS NATURAL MONOPOLIES

The conventional view in Australia, however, is that doubts about multiculturalism and (usually) about high immigration numbers are a manifestation of racial prejudice. Since racial prejudice is immoral and illegitimate—and based on irrational fears and ignorance—politicians should, it is argued, resist its demands and combat it with educational campaigns. But the expectation that immigrants should adapt to some degree to the prevailing culture in exchange for being accepted into it is neither racist nor irrational.

Cultures display many of the characteristics of natural monopolies. The social conventions and institutions that make up a way of life are valuable to those who use them precisely because so many other people use them; and the more people who do use them, the more valuable they are to everyone who uses them (in economic terms, they bring 'increasing returns to scale'). The best example is language: the more people speak a language, the more incentive there is to learn it, and the more valuable it is to all who speak it.

On the face of it, the benefits of sharing a culture may seem to justify protecting them from potential competition. For example, the established legal system enables those who use it to conduct more transactions, and to do so more cheaply, than if the legal nature and status of commercial transactions themselves had to be constantly negotiated between the parties. The public interest would seem to be better served by making the estab-

lished legal system compulsory than by opening it to potential competition from rival legal systems. On these grounds, there may seem to be a case for granting a privileged monopoly status to conventions like, say, legal systems, languages and currencies.

Multiculturalism has made it harder, not easier, for Australians to appreciate the uncommonly high level of intercultural harmony and tolerance that exists in their country

But social conventions are always subject to competition at their margins. Most countries have an official language; but many of their residents, in some contexts, speak other languages. At the same time, English has emerged spontaneously as the preferred (but by no means exclusive) international language. Alternative legal systems have grown up in response to the high cost of dealing with established ones. In the international economy, the free play of currencies has led to a few of them becoming the preferred ones for international transactions.

The benefits of such competition are too valuable to forgo. Although a society may have invested in conventions that enable it to prosper, it must also be exposed to other ways of doing things which may be more productive and from which it can learn. In a flourishing society, ways of doing things are always gradually changing; people feel naturally protective towards established conventions but are also flexible enough to adapt to new ones. International competition heightens this tension between the established and the new; but if we want to regenerate the sources of our prosperity we cannot avoid it, even though we may try to do so through reactionary and nostalgic movements





inspired by the delusion that a more comfortable past can be re-created through an act of will.

We can't have a great deal of freedom of choice over the conventions that we make use of. We don't choose the society into which we are born; nor can we normally avoid becoming socialized into it. Later in life we can change some of the conventions we follow, like the language we speak, and even the customs and moral beliefs to which we subscribe. Such changes and choices are costly because, in growing up, we make an investment in our own culture and become prejudiced in favour of it as a way of maintaining its value and the freedom it makes possible. Cultural conservatism is not irrational if it flows from a calculation that it's not worth forgoing the benefits of that investment or to incur the costs of investing in alternative cultures. But such conservatism is likely to be inefficient and counterproductive if it slips into cultural protectionism, since a society that refused to expose its conventions to the potential competition of foreign ones would eventually be eclipsed by more adaptable societies.

DEPOLITICIZING CULTURAL PLURALISM

The best way governments can ease the tensions and misunderstandings generated by multiculturalism is to cease having 'cultural' policies. Culture is not amenable to government intervention. The communist experiment conclusively demonstrated that many social conventions can survive the most intense and dedicated attempts to extinguish or change them. At the same time, 'disadvantage' should be interpreted exclusively in terms of need. Treating all persons with non-English-speaking backgrounds as automatically disadvantaged encour-

ages rent-seeking by ethnic organizations and provokes resentment among taxpayers.

That said, governments can promote cultural harmony indirectly with policies that sustain the rule of law and preserve individual freedom. Such policies may have cultural aspects to them; for example, prohibiting discrimination and providing services like interpreters in the courts or English-language tuition. But such interventions are fully justified by reference to abstract principles that have no cultural content.

As well, Australia's approach to immigration could be rethought. The present programme revolves around politically-charged annual decisions on the numbers of both the total intake and its component categories. An alternative approach would be to charge immigrants for the right of entry, whether by auctioning an annual quota or by establishing an entry fee and accepting all comers (subject to present screening processes).⁶ Such sums could be viewed as payments for benefits from current welfare and other government services. They would help bias the intake towards immigrants with good employment prospects (many payments would in fact be made by employers who had recruited immigrant workers). They would subsidize the humanitarian refugee immigration programme. They would enable ethnic groups to sustain substantial family reunion by bearing the entry costs themselves (which is increasingly happening already). The precise levels of entry fees or of any annual quota would remain to be decided periodically, but this is unlikely to generate the degree of tension that the present system does.

CONCLUSION

Economic globalization promises to realize the nineteenth-century ideal of a genuinely integrated and interdependent humanity. Yet signs of disillusionment with internationalization are evident in several Western countries, Australia included. It may be that democracies will tolerate a high level of international influence on their

ways of life only if they think they can control the terms on which this takes place. At worst, this may lead to a return of high levels of protection and inefficiently low levels of immigration. At best, individual countries will believe they have something of value to contribute to the world and will not lose it as a result of enhanced exposure to the world. Countries which are culturally self-confident are more likely to take the latter course than the former. In my opinion, multiculturalism has made it harder, not easier, for Australians to appreciate the uncommonly high level of intercultural harmony and tolerance that exists in their country.

NOTES

- 1 S. FitzGerald, *Immigration: A Commitment to Australia*, AGPS, Canberra, 1988 (Report of the Committee to Advise on Australia's Immigration Policies).
- 2 Office of Multicultural Affairs, *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*, AGPS, Canberra, 1989.
- 3 J. Zubrzycki, 'Beyond Multiculturalism', in *Multicultural Australia? Ethnic Claims and Religious Values*, The Galatians Group Inc., Armadale, 1995, pages 75-88.
- 4 P. Kelly, 'The Curse of the M-Word', *The Weekend Australian*, 30-31 August 1997.
- 5 C. Price, 'Ethnic Intermixture in Australia', *People and Place*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1994, pages 8-11.
- 6 M. Harrison, 'Auctioning the Immigration Quota', *Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1989, pages 26-28.



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