

Institute of Ideas and Institut français

Attention Seeking: multiculturalism and the politics of recognition

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Diversity - celebrating difference or making a virtue of inequality?

Speakers:

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Discussion chaired by **Dolan Cummings**

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Following last year's violent disturbances in Northern towns, a Home Office report found that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives. These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges, said the report's authors. The Cattle Report continues: 'the failure to communicate is compounded by the lack of honest and robust debate as people tip-toe around the sensitive issues of race, religion and culture.' I want to argue that the politics of multiculturalism not only places us in parallel lives, but in separate universes. When the world is viewed darkly through the prism of culture, robust, honest debate is impossible.

My presentation will focus on Sir William Macpherson's definition of racism, a view which now underpins official thinking on multiculturalism. First though I want to make a disclaimer. My interest is in Macpherson's definition of racism, not in the particular ins and outs of the Stephen Lawrence case. For the record, I personally believe the investigation was bungled, I also condemn the Metropolitan Police force's record on race and many other policing issues. Describing racism as a 'corrosive disease', Macpherson describes what had been previously regarded as a political question, problem, or issue as a manifestation of culture. This is his definition: 'It [racism] can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour, which amount to discrimination, which amount to unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping, which disadvantage minority ethnic people'.

This is an entirely cultural view of human beings and social relations. On one level it is self-evidently ridiculous. You can have racism without racists, and it trivialises a serious problem. If police officers discriminate in the exercise of their extensive powers, such as stop and search, it is not a question of individual fault, nor is it a criticism of policing policy or the draconian powers the police force has accrued and has continued to be given over the past two decades. The definition is far more insidious than that. By regarding people as essentially irrational, with their activity determined by external forces, outside an individual's control, our best intentions can be questioned and dismissed: an ideology that increasingly, as an organising principle of the state in diverse areas of policy, has disturbing ramifications for us all.

I want to give some examples from Macpherson's inquiry, to show the de-humanising effect of the multiculturalist outlook. The first three examples I've given form a sort of genre, called 'so much for good intentions'. One: DC Holden and DC Beven were family liaison police officers criticised by the inquiry. I quote 'we accept, as did council for Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, that the officers' intentions were good. Mrs. Lawrence accepted herself that DC Holden on the 20th of April took the trouble to deliver a birthday card to her daughter who was away on an outward bound course. Mrs. Lawrence said this was done because DC Holden 'wanted to be helpful'.

Regrettably, the liaison as a whole failed despite the good intentions of the officers involved. Plainly Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence were in their eyes and to their perception patronised and inappropriately treated. A plain but unintentional failure to treat them appropriately and professionally in their own culture and as a black grieving family. DC Bevan and DC Holden will forever deny that they are racist, or that the colour or culture and ethnic origin of the Lawrence family played any part in the failure of family liaison. We are bound to say that the conclusion that we reach is inescapable: inappropriate behaviour and patronising attitudes towards this black family were a product and a manifestation of unwitting racism at work.' There is no evidence here that Bevan or Holder acted intentionally in any way. Birthday cards notwithstanding, we are asked to believe that a strong sense of mutual alienation and conflict pervades this human encounter.

Other well intentioned actors also came unstuck with Macpherson. Inspector Ian Little was involved in a case from the beginning. His protestations that he treats people equally cut no mustard with Macpherson. Little did say, I quote, that:

'Everybody should be treated the same, that he tried to be as sensitive as he could be with everybody, irrespective of who they were. Although he had worked in multicultural societies and areas throughout his services, and believed that he had treated everybody in the same way, his lack of sensitivity betrayed conduct which demonstrates and inability to deal properly with bereaved people and particularly those bereaved as a result of a terrible racist attack. He failed to deal with the family appropriately and professionally, and this was unwitting racism at work.'

Such is the estranging and dominating power of Metropolitan Police culture, Macpherson insists, that even racially aware black officers, who we must believe had good intentions as well, are racists. The Metropolitan Police Officers' Black Police Officers' Association gave evidence to the inquiry, which included the following, I quote: 'We should not underestimate the occupational culture within the police service as being a primary source of institutional racism, in the way that we differentially treat black people. Interestingly, I say 'we' because there is no difference between black and white in the force essentially. We are all consumed by this occupational culture. Some of us may think we rise above it on some occasions, but, generally speaking, we tend to conform to the norms of this occupational culture which we say is all powerful in shaping our views and perceptions of a particular community.'

Self knowledge, or any objective knowledge or judgement of human affairs, is denied here, unless, of course, it seems one has been, like Macpherson, the judge. We are so different, in this outlook, that even the best intentioned and most experienced of us are incapable of interaction without unwittingly, unconsciously, feeding suspicion and hostility towards those who are truly others. Parallel lives indeed. If accepted,

the conclusions of this cultural view strike at the heart of equality and democracy. A view that sees our relationships as unwitting, unconscious and damaging to others can only be hostile to freedom. In this world-view, nothing can be shared, we have nothing in common. We're back to the Cattle Report: 'these lives do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap or promote any meaningful interchanges'. Except such a result is a product of multiculturalism, not, as some would have, its denial. The climate engendered by the multiculturalist outlook positively encourages, and in some cases enforces, mutual incomprehension, whatever the evidence, however innocuous – back to the Macpherson report.

On the back of the report, on the printed version, you will find a photographed exhibit. It is a photograph of a crumpled piece of paper with Doreen Lawrence's handwriting on it. The exhibit is not noted for the information therein but for its battered appearance. I go back to Macpherson and he's talking about a state of affairs that during a meeting Doreen Lawrence handed a note to Detective Superintendent William Ilsley, which contained a list of suspects, information already known to the investigation, and Doreen Lawrence was basically listing what was known at that time. And now I'll quote from the report:

'The question of the handing over of this note has always been a bone of contention. In more than one statement, Mrs. Lawrence said that Mr. Ilsley had rolled the piece of paper up in a ball in his hand. Various versions of Mrs. Lawrence's statement were read before the inquiry and it is to be noted that she also invariably said that Mr. Ilsley folded the piece of paper up first. At the inquiry Mrs. Lawrence seemed to have accepted that the paper was folded up tight, but not rolled into a ball. Either way it seems to us that what Mr. Ilsley did was insensitive, discourteous and unwise. There was no reason to even fold the paper up into a small packet, and the perception of Mrs. Lawrence quite plainly was that he was doing this in a dismissive way. We remain convinced that it was tactless to say the least to fold the piece of paper up so tight that Mrs. Lawrence could conceivably form the impression, as she did, that the paper was of little consequence to Mr. Ilsley. What he did was to put the piece of paper in his pocket without any expression of interest or gratitude to Mrs. Lawrence; it is perfectly true that when he returned to the incident room he at once put the information contained on that piece of paper into the system, so it seems he did himself intend to transmit the information to the senior investigating officer and the investigating team, but by then the damage had been done.'

If, when a crumpled sheet of paper can become an exhibit in one of the most high profile and significant public inquiries in decades – it is not surprising, and the Home Office's Cattle post-Oldham and Bradford report is disingenuous to express surprise – that people tip-toe around the sensitive issues of race, religion and culture.

In conclusion, I want to suggest, and I hope this will come up in our later discussions, that equality lies in the human capacity to reason, to argue what is right and wrong, to come to judgement and decide. Political equality and democracy, and the progressives who fight for these things, aim to make that enlightened stand-point the operative one in human affairs. It may not exist, and it doesn't exist in this country, but it is both possible and desirable to strive for it. An operational principle that sees people as unwitting, unconscious and damaging, whatever the best intentions of those people, denies equality and the freedoms that come with it.

What price the individual's rights when even the best-intentioned are guilty of racism? Judgement, the very idea of right and wrong, the basis of democracy, is attacked. There's no room for argument, no meeting of minds, when people cannot even know what they are doing. The keystone of enlightened politics, an appeal to people's reason, falls if we can have nothing in common with people of other cultures. As state policy, it sets public institutions up as policemen for all, in all that we do. Authority necessarily becomes the arbitrary management of the unwitting, as legislation, such as the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, creates a new legal duty on all public authorities and bodies to promote 'good relations between persons of different racial groups'. To make cultural outlook the organising principle of public authority is dangerous. Policing the unwitting, nothing shared, nothing in common, parallel lives, separate hostile universes – that is the politics of multiculturalism.

Paul Kelly

First of all, I too am a political egalitarian: I believe in political equality, like the previous speaker, like the speakers earlier on. However, I find myself in the curious position here of wanting to defend the multiculturalists. It's been very easy to sort of rough these guys up, so what I'm going to do is try to suggest that there's something more to multiculturalism than the bad guys that we've already depicted. Why? Well firstly, if you follow the American political philosopher Ronald Dworkin, he basically says that all significant political theories are about equality. I think that's as true of multiculturalism as it is of other kinds of theories. What multiculturalists want is equality. If you look at the key multiculturalist thinkers Biko Parekh in Britain, Canadian theorists Will Kymlicka and Jim Tulley, Iris Marion Young and Nancy Fraser in the US, and Chandra Kukathros in Australia, they're all concerned with equality. Equality is not an issue between these people.

When we think about political equality, we tend to think of political equality in terms of equalising access to certain kinds of key resources: we want to equalise basic political rights, maybe to some extent equalise access to some minimal level of economic resources and certain kinds of social goods, education and so on. We might even think of equalisation of a certain social respect. That's what we look for, and then we judge wrongs and injustices in terms of obstacles to those things. We think of inequality in terms of discrimination – putting bars in front of people's access to their legitimate resources, rights and goods. This is what political egalitarians believe in, and to some extent what I believe in, but I think the multiculturalists tell us something very important about what's problematic about that agenda, and encourage those of us who are progressive, political liberals, egalitarians, they encourage us perhaps to be a little more humble, to show a little more humility.

What is it that the multiculturalists identify as being problematic? Well, think of what I've said: the quest for equalities in terms of justifying certain kinds of norms that equalise access to political goods. Those norms structure fair cooperation in society between individuals and between groups. Where do those norms come from? Earlier, we had Kenan Malik talking about the aspiration to universal norms. Where are those universal norms? And this is where I think the multiculturalist theorists raise two very important points – firstly, to be philosophical, there's an epistemological point, there's a question of how we know what these universal values are. Do they exist independently of societies, do they exist independently of cultures, are they just there for us to sort of draw into the debate.

The second point that some multiculturalists make – Parekh is very important in this respect – is to say that even if you believe in universal values, human rights, whatever, what is their content? Why should we agree on a particular account of what those rights are? What are they? Think of things that, again, Kenan raised earlier: freedom of expression. Now that's a fundamental issue, a fundamental good that we want to equalise. But what do we mean by freedom of expression? Is freedom of expression obvious, independent of cultural nuance? No, it isn't. If you think about how we think of the jurisprudence of the freedom of expression, we have traditions of interpretation – it's a cultural matter of how we interpret things like incitement, from legitimate free expression. It's a cultural matter, perhaps, why we say that somebody who blasphemes against the prophets – as we might describe what Rushdie did – it's a cultural matter whether we say that is either right or wrong, and why we say incitement is right or wrong. Where we draw those lines in terms of cashing out our account of these universal values is culturally imbued, so multiculturalists are saying, "look at what you're asking for". Yes, universal values – but what are they? That's where multicultural negotiation comes in, because we can only cash out our rights in terms of discreet understanding of what those rights should be. There's no objective, Platonic form, independent of cultural experience.

So that's the epistemological point. The other important point that follows from that that multiculturalists pick on has to do with political power, and some of the questions earlier sort of alluded to that. If the issue was deciding who decides the content of these rights, these values, what political equality actually consists of, if the issue is who decides, we have to take account of the underlying structures of power in our society. If we say "ok, well, we'll negotiate this politically, we'll decide politically how we do this", when you have pluralistic, multicultural, poly-ethnic, international societies, these are the things multiculturalists are concerned with. You have positional advantage that can be exploited by the majority which can dictate the terms of social cooperation in accordance with their interests. The easy dash to political equality ignores that: who decides? What's the content? How do we legislate these norms? That's what the multiculturalists are concerned with, that's something which possibly fits under the broad rubric of political equality. Structural disadvantage is important – why? Well, even if you could equalise access to all the relevant social goods, you have the legacy of cultural disadvantage, you have the legacy of domination and oppression to deal with.

There's interesting book by an American economist, *Anatomy of Racial Equality*. In it, Ben Laurie writes about how racial inequalities are sustained in the United States not by lack of access to resources, not by direct discrimination, but by issues of racial stigma: the way in which groups in a sense become even self-censoring in terms of their expectations because of the ways other groups treat them. If you look at issues like group disproportionality in terms of the distribution of certain types of goods, if you look at women's representation in universities for example, there's no formal legal barriers preventing women becoming senior professors, but there aren't many of them – now why is that? Well, maybe women have got better things to do? But we can't assume that they are simply making different ambition-sensitive choices. We also have to think about the way in which the opportunities themselves are structured by social meanings – those are culturally imbued. So looking at culture, looking at groups, is important in terms of cashing out our concerns for political equality. I think that's really important in terms of thinking about what multiculturalists want – they're on the same agenda, but they look at the way equality is manifested and sustained in different ways.

Why am I not, then, a multiculturalist? Well, just to briefly finish, I think there's all sort of problems about the concept of culture itself, and we tend to look at those in terms of identity and fluidity and overlappingness and all the rest of it.

Multiculturalists can advise us, can make us look in certain places for the roots of injustice. The problem is that multiculturalists are very bad at giving us an account of how you deal with those things. The reason for that is because of precisely the issue they identify in terms of relationships of oppression and domination. Those things, those relationships, can appear within cultures, within political associations, within political communities, within families, between individuals just as much as they can appear between groups.

So the group analysis, in a sense, can be carried down to the individual level. Communities, associations, families and so on can be sources of injustice as well as source of goods. Culture is not always benign. Their analysis in a sense undercuts the normative principles you're going to get from that. So why I'm a political egalitarian is because I believe, in the end, the only way you can deal with these injustices is by looking at issues of distribution of resources, access to opportunities and certain kinds of rights. But why I think political egalitarians need to be more chastened is because we shouldn't assume that the way in which we understand those rights, those resources and so on is fixed, universal, independent of culture. We always have to be on guard that we're not simply imposing one particular culture's understanding of what these things are on others, and making them conform to our will.

Raj Pal

I really do feel like the odd man out here. I shall confine myself to my narrow field, and I'm not here to represent my employers at all, and the reason I say that is because the needs and ethos of one's employers are not always the same one's own, but the harsh reality of life is that one has to earn a living. So what I'm going to try to do is very quietly try to set out a justification for these two. There is a long British tradition of compartmentalising peoples and institutionalising difference. You try to go through any 19th century discourse, any 19th century work on anthropology, particularly from the Victorian era, and you notice this obsession with recording, with documenting, and with compartmentalising groups. These groups are ascribed certain cultural, certain behavioural, certain ethnic, and often certain racial traits too, which set them apart from others. I think you know what I'm talking about – the classic example of this is the British theory of races in India. Once you have these groups set up, leaders of them are often selected or appointed to act as mediator between the bigger authority and these so-called groups. It was the logic of this, really, that led, in the middle of the last century, to the development of the 'two nations theory', that Hindus and Muslims, for instance, constituted two groups which were irreconcilable and had to live separately, and so created the bloody mess that resulted in partition.

I have a personal stake in this. I am the child of refugees both my mother and my father and I was born in a refugee hut in India at the end of 1957. So, this is an easy strategy to deal with from the point of view of an occupying power, which is what the British were in India. However, it is also inimical to commonality, it is inimical to building civil society. It is my contention that this trend continues very much in my own field of arts and culture provision. For instance, I live in Birmingham, and you have in a city such as Birmingham and other cities of that ilk, a game of division, you

have a game of quotas, you have a game of community representation that both mainstream political parties and community leaders collude in. And institutions, believe me, in my field, are perfectly happy to do that. Their approach is 'samosas, saris and steel bands' as Stuart Hall once dismissed them, I think lets them off the much bigger hook of having to look at the so-called mainstream provision, which has to be more accessible, which has to be more valuable, which has to be more relevant to the diversity, the much derided word diversity, in the broader sectors of society.

I make no bones about it, that is the field that I work in and that's what I strive for. However, I think that in trying to develop this notion of attracting and reaching out to diversities you are actually not representing diversities, and my own service, my own museums and arts service is guilty of that 'samosas, saris and steel bands' approach, and I'll give you an example of that: I shudder every time I see a Mandi demonstration in one of my sights, and I feel awful not doing too much about it, because you know Mandi, the decoration of hands, most people in India and Pakistan don't do that any more, and my museum services do it. So that's a classic example of *physician heal thyself*.

Coming down to the question of where I stand, I am philosophically and temperamentally of the view that that which unites human beings of so-called different cultures, of so-called different ethnicities, of so-called different religions, etcetera, is far more prevalent than that which may be different. An analogy might be that 999 aeroplanes land and take off safely, and yet the exception – the one that crashes – is the one that everybody latches on to. There are, I believe, values which are the commonwealth, literally the commonwealth, of all human beings and not of particular social groups based on their race or ethnicity. Values such as tolerance and philosophical inquiry are not unique to the Enlightenment or to Europe. As I was saying to Dolan earlier this week, I think we have to accept that the way these values are articulated by Europeans is designed to put off, and has the effect of putting off, minorities that don't happen to originate from Europe and minorities that are not white. So I think that's the kind of thing that we need to bear in mind.

The trouble is, I think, is that the arts and cultural provision in this country is one of the very last bastions of conservatism. I'll elaborate on that: we're often protected, I feel, by those notions of cultural superiority. A hundred and fifty, two hundred years of practice in the arts and cultures which denigrates and devalues, and has to denigrate, has to devalue, the arts, the achievements and the cultures of peoples who have been subjugated, or people who are soon to be subjugated, because, just to divert a little, that is the only way you can justify your subjugation of those peoples – if you denigrate their achievements, if you denigrate their cultures. A hundred and fifty, two hundred years of that culture, of that history, cannot just be wished away all of a sudden, and we all hope that all arts provision is equal and all arts provision is very accessible etcetera. There is a long tradition of that, of dismissing the arts and cultures of subjugated people. And a classic case is Pata Mita's work *Much Maligned Monsters*, about the arts of India, the way they were viewed over a period of time.

I just want to give two examples of that. One of the great pleasures of my life has been to interpret and re-display a wonderful object in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery – where I no longer work by the way. It's called the Sultan Gange Budhha. It's a monumentally beautiful object, one and a half thousand years old, and it's a classic work, unique of its kind, of the lost wax process, which means there's a single

piece of casting. When the Buddha was dug up in the course of railway excavation in 1968 in northern India, the British engineers who dug it up naturally believed that it must have come from Birmingham of all places, for sale in India, and it must have got lost until they dug it up. Because it was beyond them in their cultural superiority, it was beyond their conception that somehow these Indians could have the technology, or the wherewithal, or the means to conceptualise building an object such as that.

Another very small example that comes to my mind is an exhibition that I curated a few years ago called *Entwined*, a wonderful exhibition of miniature paintings using a classic north Indian genre, miniature painting, but contextualising it by depicting contemporary life, political, cultural, religious issues in British society. And yet an exhibition that I had a great deal of difficulty in touring because most curators, museums, most art galleries didn't believe that that was, in quotes, 'the kind of stuff we do'. So when it was toured to some galleries, it was handled by Social History curators, and not by art curators.

So, such an ideology, I feel, continues to survive in the arts and cultural provision of this country. So Moghul miniatures, Benin bronzes, are seen as the epitome of the arts of these countries, but nothing since, nothing beyond that, and that's very painful. The biggest irony, then, in conclusion, is that I think that the collusion of mediators with political leaders, the collusion of mediators and mainstream arts and cultural organisations, in a funny way, in an ironic way, continues to perpetuate a practice whereby much of the vitality, much of the vibrancy that exists in this society, that has come about in this society as a result of the migration of the last fifty odd years, is not reflected in the arts and cultural provision. Not by a system of quotas, not through a system of viewing everything as equal, but simply even on a principle of aesthetics is not necessarily represented.

The vibrancy of this culture was brought home to me a few weeks ago on holiday in Florence, where I was struck by the fact that for all the denigration that Britain has historically suffered for its lack of any cuisine, walk out from here and within five minutes you can have access to five, ten different kinds of food, five, ten different kinds of cuisines. And yet in Florence, a city of great culture, the only fucking food you can eat is Italian – there is nothing else apart from Italian. So I think that for me this is a much richer tradition, a much richer reality than exists in any other European country.

So I'll finish by saying, it is not the institutionalisation of difference that I seek, not at all, I'm not even a political egalitarian, I'm just an old fashioned socialist who was struck very much by what Kenan Malik said about his generation and my generation. As a seventeen year old migrant I fought for the right to be equal, and it pains me now when I see the younger generation who fight for the right to be ghettoised, who fight for the right to be different. Yes, you can have some differences but the equality is something that drives me with much passion to my very being. So I'll finish with this. I don't seek the institutionalisation of difference, what I seek is a better reflection of the complex world that we live in and the provision of that complexity, the provision of that beauty, the provision of that vibrancy in my own field of arts and culture. Thank you.

Dolan Cummings

Thanks to all our speakers. Before I bring things out to the audience I'll pose a question to each of the speakers to stir things up a bit.

Bruno, if I could come to you first. Paul made this point that equality rights, all the things that you have been talking about, are not necessarily as objective as you might think, that they are culturally determined. Raj, in fact, perhaps made a similar point, which is that the way they are presented often seems condescending to people who aren't from a European background. How do you respond to that? Do you think it's a problem of presentation? Do you think that equality is a cultural construct that has to be challenged?

Bruno Waterfield

I would like to do that by giving an example of what it means when you give cultural rights in terms of provision and in terms of access. And I want to argue that it shows that yes, while there are cultural artifacts of rational thought and of the Enlightenment, these are maybe worth keeping.

My example is minority provision within the new diversity of education in the contemporary UK. A lot of provision is being given to a dwindling minority, a very tiny unrepresentative minority in the UK, Christians. And a very interesting question was asked to Tony Blair in the House of Commons a few months ago. He was asked by Jenny Tonge, a Lib Dem MP, whether he was happy to allow the teaching of creationism alongside Darwin's theory of evolution in state schools. She was referring to Emmanuel College which is run by a Christian evangelical sect up in the North East. Blair's reply was interesting. 'It would be very unfortunate, he said, 'if concerns about that issue were seen to remove a very strong incentive to ensure that we have a diverse a school system as we properly can. In the end a more diverse school system will deliver better results for our children. If she looks at the school's results, I think she will find that they are very good.'

So this access to education for this minority group in the north east, a tiny minority, has led to very good school results. It gets glowing Ofsted reports. But the Headmaster of the school, writing in a pamphlet, argues – and this is what they teach in their school – that evolution, like creationism, is one faith position among others, they are equal positions. 'Clearly schools are required to teach evolutionary theory. We agree they should teach evolution as a theory and a faith position. Again it is important to distinguish between evolutionary theory and the faith position of evolutionism. Clearly schools should also teach the creation theory as literally depicted in Genesis. This too is a faith position of which young people should be aware.'

So we have to ask what this access is worth, what does it produce, what is the cultural artifact of this kind of minority provision? The cultural artifacts are kids who are taught that Darwinism is no more right or wrong than what is written in Genesis. Now sorry, that kind of access and that kind of provision to me is destructive. I don't think that I am defending the state, I don't think I am defending the status quo, I don't think I am defending the western white European, when I say that for anyone in the world Darwinism and Darwin's theory of evolution is a better position than creationism. There can be no equality between those two points of view, and I think that it is very destructive to introduce the equality of superstition and science into our education system.

Dolan Cummings

Okay Paul, how do you respond to that?

Paul Kelly

Well I think the way that I would respond to it is not by of thinking in terms of what's true and what is not true. I mean, in the end, we are stuck in having an education system where we have to make culturally imbued choices. I mean, I have views about what is true and what isn't true. My concern is what is the state's role in imposing the truth on people. If you take a very robust view of what is wrong with creationism, that might carry over into asking does the state have a duty to extirpate religious belief amongst children who subscribe to those sort of putatively bizarre views. Does the state really have that responsibility, or is it important in some sense for political communities to allow for diversity and just let, if you like, the cultural marketplace rise. You know, if these kids want to go into the world, if their parents want them to go into the world, believing that creationism is better than anything else, or that the world is flat, that gravity doesn't exist, those cultures will die out. We don't need to worry about that. People can believe stupid things, and if people are allowed freedom, and equality of respect, they will believe stupid things. It's not our job to make them believe non-stupid things. Otherwise, we end up with the Thought Police second-guessing all of our judgements. This is the cost of freedom, this is the cost of equality. The cost of equality is that people believe things that we don't, and we just have to accept that.

Dolan Cummings

Lastly, can I come to you Raj. In a sense, I guess, Bruno's arguing that the products of certain cultures – Darwinism obviously emerges from a particular culture – take on an objective value, and transcend their particular cultures. And isn't there an analogy to be made with culture in the artistic sense? Can you talk about Culture in fact, culture with a capital 'C', or is culture as we talk about it in terms of policy simply the product of a particular culture? Is it really cultures, or can we talk about culture in a universal sense?

Raj Pal

First of all, I hope that Bruno doesn't think that I am at variance with his view. I am not at all different in where I stand. Where I stand is this: having started by saying that I speak an individual, I also feel that it is my ethical duty to try and serve in a way which reflects the needs of the people in the borough where I work. It doesn't mean that I have to lower myself down to the lowest common denominator. What it means for me, unlike a lot of my colleagues, is to deliver a more focused quality service which is accessible, which actually takes an overview.

I'll give you an example of this, something that is a great passion of mine. I have my office in a wonderful yeoman farmer's Tudor manor house, and adjacent to this manor house are two neglected barns which we are trying to develop, with support. Now one of my great passions in life is to use those barns to develop self-directed learning, a discovery gallery which, unlike any other National Trust property in this country, places the Tudors in the context of a much larger world. So the Tudors, the Tudor civilization, the Tudor way of living, Tudor sciences, Tudor arts etcetera, how do they impact upon the Americas, how do they impact upon Asia, how do they impact upon Africa, how do they impact upon Europe – and vice versa, how they are impacted upon by those things? Now what is that driven by? It is not driven by

compartmentalising Africans, or Asians, or Americans, or Indians, or British and so on and so forth. It is driven fundamentally by my own personal philosophy – and I am in the very curious position of making my views have a greater weight than others – but that is driven fundamentally by that spirit of inquiry, to which as a human being I am fundamentally committed. Because I think that that spirit of inquiry has to ask uncomfortable questions, so this is not going to be an arty-farty discovery gallery which says how wonderful, and how awfully victimized, Africans were or Asians were. It will really look at uncomfortable as well as comfortable questions, in an aesthetically visually pleasing, but more learning environment. I don't think there is anything wrong in taking an overview, especially one which I feel other historians haven't taken.

Lastly, I'll just come back to the point some of you might have noted, and I'm sure that you are dying to ask – why then are you involved in Black History Month? Well I am involved in the Black History Foundation in Birmingham for the fundamental reason that I don't believe that it is a separatist organization, and it cannot be a separatist organisation as long as I am on its board. But I'm also involved because I feel that just as radical historians in the nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties had to unravel layers of working class history in this country, similarly the Black History Foundation can provide a basis for unravelling those other layers that make history more exciting, again in that larger spirit of inquiry. Not simply to say how awful white people were, or how wonderful and victimised black people were, but to really look at uncomfortable as well as comfortable questions which, at the end of the day, I think enhance our understanding of our past and representation of the present.

Dolan Cummings

Thanks Raj. So let's go to the audience.

Audience member 1

My name is Stephen Schick. Firstly, I'd like to say that Doctor Kelly is, perhaps intentionally, confusing political equality, at least in the traditional sense, with socio-economic equality, and trying to combine the two. So if you believe in basic rights you have to believe in positive discrimination, equal access and all that. Well, I believe in basic political rights, but I don't believe in socio-economic equality; I think he is conflating different things.

Secondly, to rebut his argument that groups that have been oppressed need special provision. How would one account for the success largely of the fifty thousand Jewish refugees who came from Europe before the war? They were specifically told by their own community to integrate, not to make special demands, not to be culturally separatist. They reached the top of British society in every field, and many of them are very ardent opponents of current multiculturalism and ethnic separatism, which they regard as inimicable to the progress of those who form other groups. I think this is just a confusion of socio-economic with political and cultural.

Dolan Cummings

Chris Gilligan, who is speaking this afternoon.

Audience member 2

Just a question really on what is universal culture. A number of people referred to universal culture – the example that Bruno gave, of Darwinism. I don't know if that

is a good one to illustrate what universal culture is, because it seems to me that the theory of evolution is not a theory, there is the fossil evidence and the biological evidence to show that it is a fact, it is not a social construct. Whereas equality is a social construct, and something that is culturally formed because it's an idea that is historically specific, and we know that it is culturally formed because inequality exists in society. So in a sense it is an ideal – the fact is that there are so many inequalities as well. So in what sense can we say that equality is partly universal culture because it does seem to come across when everyone talks about universal culture that equality is fundamental to it.

Audience member 3

Jennie Bristow from *spiked*. I think that there is a bit of a recognition in society of the problems of multiculturalism and institutionalised difference, in a way that many of the panel have hinted at. There also seems to have been an attempt to do something about it. What I think is interesting amongst the intellectual and political elite is their abject failure to do so. There doesn't seem to be any faith in universal values that you can actually counterpose to multiculturalist ideology today. I thought it was interesting when Doctor Kelly raised that question, I hope I'm not misquoting you, the multiculturalist view of 'well how do we know that these are universal values?' It's not just multiculturalists who are asking this, it is the elite. There is no real belief in a set of what used to be the elite's own values.

So it would seem to me that a big reason for the spread of multiculturalist ideology is not the strength of those arguments, but the weakness of the intellectual and political elite today, where they can't promote an ideology of their own. So you therefore get a latching on to all kinds of other ideas – which is fine, provided that that doesn't go too far, because then it is fundamentalism – and that is how we end up with this plurality of rather wishy-washy beliefs. And then you have a problem, as I think Bruno's presentation indicated, this kind of recognition that everyone is living in separate worlds and that we need to integrate. You get a panicked response, but all that then comes of it is some daft proposal to teach everybody English lessons, the Blunkett line, because there is no sense of any ideological alternative that can be posed, just this kind of panicked response.

Audience member 4

My question is for Paul Kelly. In your analysis, obviously very brief, of multiculturalist theory and practice, you argued that they're okay, they're on the same agenda as us as political theorists, they're concerned about equality and the roots of injustice, that's okay, it's just that their strategies are wrong. I think that there is a more fundamental problem with multiculturalism for those of us who are concerned with political and civil rights, that there is an implicit, or sometimes explicit, denial of the capacity of individuals for freedom, for representation and for co-operation, in their mistrust of the majority, in their imperative to professionalise communication.

Audience member 5

Briefly again, for Dr. Kelly. When you mentioned regarding cultural negotiation from a multicultural point of view – my question is, who are you negotiating with? I mean, are you really negotiating with ethnic minorities, or only the small group of the elite in the ethnic minorities that are actually in charge of the important decisions and ethnic organisations. Later on, they are not really representing them because they are only taking the funding for important projects, and showing, in that formal way,

that ethnic minorities are being represented. But in practice, these people do not have real access to democratic channels.

On the other hand, apparently you've got some concern that young people at the moment are not really preoccupied by equality but difference. I think that that is not the case, in the sense that maybe your impression is because the only organisations that are getting funding are precisely the organisations that propose those sort of problems. Because there are many organisations like mine, UK New Citizen, that are at the moment having big problems with funding because we propose another sort of approach regarding the participation of ethnic minorities.

On the other hand, the last thing is regarding universal norms. I am not a politician, I am not a social scientist, I am only a citizen in this country, and I understand that in a country like Great Britain, that for centuries has had an unwritten constitution, you really have a clear idea about some common norms for this country, because otherwise Great Britain would have been destroyed a long time ago. The problem is that you don't have real access to that knowledge if you are all the time in your ghetto, in your ethnic community. So it's really necessary to know better, to promote better debate, especially also considering the needs of the white population and the 90 per cent of the population that is still a real majority in the country, because otherwise we are leaving a terrible space for extremist groups, like BNP, that are apparently are the only ones who dare to speak on behalf of the 90 per cent of the population.

Dolan Cummings

Paul, do you want to take a moment or are you ready to come back?

Paul Kelly

I think I'd better get going.

Dolan Cummings

What I'll do now is let the panel respond and round up and, depending upon how much time we have left, I'll take a few more from the floor. We're here all day, so people can make points to be picked up later on. So Paul:

Paul Kelly

Can I start with the first one about the confusion. What I was saying is that political equality is itself something that people, theorists disagree about. You know, Friedrich Hayek has at least some conception of a minimal baseline, in terms of economic resources, below which people should not go. So I'm not arguing that political equality is equal to social equality, I'm saying that that's an issue for debate, that's what political theorists disagree about, so it's not a confusion, I'm just presenting what the debate is about, and that's where multiculturalists come in.

On your issue of representation of particular groups in certain professions and so on, you take the example of Jews in Britain. Are you really suggesting that there is something distinctive about that group that means that their ambition sensitive dispositions are simply... (interruption from the floor) ...I'm just saying that if you carry over the point that there is something distinctive about that group that shows that they are more successful in certain kinds of professions...(interruption from the floor)...no, no, no let me just answer the point, you've raised the issue. All that I'm saying is that the multiculturalists suggest that that is something that needs explanation. If you take the reverse view, you know 'why is it there are so many

black young males in prisons', that at least needs explanation. Now maybe the explanation is something that is benign, but that's what you need to look at, because otherwise you can potentially miss the real causes of underlying injustice. Now, as I went on to say, I don't defend that view, but multiculturalists direct our attention to certain kinds of issues. And I think they are important in some sense.

Ideological alternatives; the elite is a bit spineless. Well, when did we ever have this confident view of universal values, our elites didn't believe in universal values. If you think of British political history, our elite was not universalist in this sense. It was parochial, it believed in the specialness of our particular kinds of values: we impose our constitution on previous imperial possessions, and so on. We think there is something unique and special about what we do. All I am saying is that we need a little bit more humility about thinking what those universal values actually are. And it's not self-evident that you can just list them, even when you get to the level of 'what are basic human rights?' If you look at the declarations, if you look at the history of those declarations, different people have different views about what basic human rights are. And they are different because they bring out different conceptions of what is human nature and what is significant – who is the object that should be treated equally? That is all I want to say on that. It's not a straightforward issue, and before we jump into saying 'yes let's go for political equality', what does it mean? It is not self-evident.

Fixing political identities. I'll just go through this quickly. The last point, common knowledge – well again, the common law enshrined all sorts of group disadvantages. Universities used to have test acts; certain what we call cultural groups were debarred from certain kinds of political office; civil disabilities were imposed on different kinds of cultural groups. Again, we have to be very careful about looking at our own case and saying 'we are special, there is something intrinsic about our values that have sustained us over time'. What sustained us over time is power.

Dolan Cummings

Raj, do you want to comment on that?

Raj Pal

I've got off fairly lightly here, unlike the other two. I just want to give a small example. I think that this notion of people being trapped within different cultures or between different notions – and this is a notion that Bikhu Parekh touches on and Brian Barry gives a very good rebuttal to – is this idea of communities somehow being seen as an homogenous whole, communities being given rights as an homogenous whole. Where does it leave those individuals, where does it leave people – despite all the differences that we have about the efficacy, or otherwise, of universal rights – where does it leave those individuals who chose not to be part of those communities? Surely there is nothing wrong in saying that individuals have the right to negotiate a departure or exit, and so on and so forth, from those communities?

And I can illustrate this by a personal example: I'm a single parent with a lovely twelve year old daughter who's half English, half Indian, and yet culturally is an absolutely beautiful melange of all that I desire, all that I see. And myself, being born and brought up in India, am pretty much the product of so many diverse influences. Now I don't see that as a break in my development, I don't see that as a negative hindrance or something, I see that as a positive. If I'd grown up in India I probably wouldn't be the sort of person that I am, perhaps to the better in some

ways, but the notion of growing up in a society, the notion of growing up within a cultural milieu which encourages that spirit of inquiry, which encourages that understanding, which encourages inquisitiveness, is, to me, something that is very desirable.

Now, I accept fully your point that that might not be valid, that might not be seen as acceptable by certain groups. And I think, yes, at the end of the day, there is a value judgement, but all groups make value judgements, so if you criticise the notion of equality, you yourself are making a value judgement, and it's perfectly valid to accept that that notion itself is a value judgment. So I don't really have any problems. I just want to say one thing – at the risk of pissing in the pot that I sup from – I think let's not get too far away from what I touched on earlier on, which is that often things that are articulated... Bruno touched on this notion of 'how can you be insensitive if you mean well' – well, I think that you can be insensitive when you mean well. If you go into, for instance as a police officer, a Sikh household where they don't smoke, and you continue to smoke, or you go into a Muslim household and you start demanding bacon, then I think that is an insensitivity that you have to be aware of even if your intentions are not there. I think that is something to bear in mind.

I'll just finish on this point about pissing in the pot. I think that notion of racism, of being seen as different, it impacts on your life. You don't look in the mirror every morning and say 'I'm really different', you're actually not, you don't do that. But after 27 years of living in this country I recently, earlier this year, acquired British nationality. And the fundamental reason that I waited British nationality was that I had to give up my Indian passport. I wanted to hang on to it, but the Indian government does not allow dual-nationality. And I thought, maybe there's some sort of romantic attachment, it makes it easier to visit India. And I gave it up primarily because of year after year after year after year of coming to the French consulate visa section just round the corner, and being abused and made to feel like a third-class citizen, someone who has a child here, who has a wonderful career here, who has a house here. Being treated as a criminal, just because I wanted to go to France for a week. And let's not get too far away from the reality that most people who are not white, and of white European background feel.

Dolan Cummings

Thanks Raj. Bruno, I'll let you sum up.

Bruno Waterfield

I'll make two points quickly, if I can. I think on the issue of the Darwinism versus creationism, I sympathise with Chris's view that evolution is science, it's natural science, you can show it, the evidence is there. And it's not me who's decided, as the Prime Minister has, that actually it's just one theory, a social theory, almost a faith position among others. And sadly that is being taught in our schools – at least one – and we have a national curriculum that allows that kind of equivalence, which actually brings me on to Paul's point. I agree with Paul that creationism is an idea that is dying out – I don't think that the children who have the misfortune to be taught by religious zealots and bigots in Emmanuel College will leave that school thinking that God made the Earth and everything on it six and a half thousand years ago – or whatever it is that they think. I don't think that at all; those ideas will die out. I think what is sad is that they will go away being taught that there is an equivalence between a theory and a science that is a product of inquiry, free experimentation, of work, of rigorous work with high burdens of proof. An idea that

has been fought for – let's not forget that there are problems teaching evolutionary theory in schools in the United States of America, for example. This is an idea that has had to fight to survive. And I am very disturbed that the British state is giving money to promote the idea that these ideas are equivalent. If people want to believe that in their personal life, then fine, it will die out very soon, that's okay.

Now, just finally, going back to Macpherson, I think that the important thing is not that these police officers were insensitive, there's no doubt that they were. I don't know if anyone here has ever met any senior officers in the Metropolitan police – their social skills leave a lot to be desired; they are not, on the whole, pleasant people. They are on a bit of a moral crusade, and they exercise a lot of arbitrary power every day of their lives, which actually has a terrible cultural impact on people as a whole. But the point is that no evidence could be shown with any of these particular officers that they were actually racists. And so Macpherson has to fall back on the stand-by that they are unwitting. Now the idea that we are unwitting, or unconscious, in our relations with others poses a very, very severe problem. Yes there are all of these social conflicts, and there are all these debates and arguments. And if we are unwitting, if that is our lot in the cultures that we bear, then there cannot be that kind of discussion.

Now, I argue that these ideas, if they are held by individuals in society have very little consequence. Those individuals will live sad lives, but that's their lookout. But when it starts to be held by people like Sir William Macpherson, who is not a poor Asian kid, or it begins to be held by Lord Parekh, the peoples' peer, these ideas are of some consequence in terms of the way in which they organise society. And the reality is that there are debates, there are discussions – people do not live unwittingly, unconsciously; we do not, in our relationships, inevitably damage, alienate and estrange others. That is a reality, and it is that reality that I also want to be a goal, and I want the exercise of reason and the appeal to argument and debate to be more operative, and not less operative, in our affairs. And my argument and my position is that the ideology of multiculturalism is a barrier to that, and a barrier to us forming new social solidarities, and new relationships, based on argument, on appeals to reason rather than this imposed division.