
This book’s oxymoronic title already encapsulates the core idea forwarded by the author, a leading figure in feminist political theory, although it would have been easier to capture had culture been placed between quotation marks. For it is a multiculturalism shaped by certain notions of culture that Phillips declines: she endorses neither essentialist views of monolithic cultures nor the opposite, cosmopolitan position. More specifically, she rejects the way culture is – in her opinion – turned into a euphemistic synonym of ethnicity and race, or even into the sole determinant of an individual’s actions.

Departing from what Phillips refers to as the present paralysis in the discourse on multiculturalism as mirrored in recent events in the Netherlands and Great Britain, she illustrates how the essentialist and cosmopolitan understandings of culture will only lead further into an impasse. With reference to American and British legal cases she shows how culture is abused to justify actions otherwise deemed inexcusable, and how cultural defences thereby tend to purport gender stereotypes: defendants often evoke the image of the betrayed man’s sexual outrage and the submissive female to account for disproportional degrees of violence or passivity. Since both men and women are thus viewed as serfs of their cultural heritage, the legislature opts for trenchant provisions to solve the most common problems of multicultural societies, e.g. by a complete ban of veils in certain domains. Hence, blind to individual desires, these blanket solutions may in some cases harm those they pretend to protect, namely oppressed individuals and especially women. Critics might instead propose to aid individuals to leave their cultural community. However, Phillips deems this ‘right to exit’ insufficient, since the onus would thereby lie solely on the individual, while her erstwhile community is no longer pressed to change. Not even the much advocated dialogue with representatives of communities constitutes – in the author’s eyes – a solution, as it only increases elitist influence within the respective communities.

‘What then?’ policy makers and judges will ask in unison. Phillips pleads for an understanding of culture similar to our perception of gender, class or religion, which would rid us of a dominating ‘straitjacket view’. How to induce such rethinking remains, however, to be resolved in practice. Phillips’ book is nevertheless a worthwhile read for scholars, students and policy makers alike: thanks to its lucid style, the thorough review of existing theories and approaches and especially due to the numerous examples, it provides an accessible and thought-provoking lecture.

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This work provides a timely contribution to discussions on the ‘justness’ of environmental degradation and change. Schlosberg’s aim is to move the study of environmental justice forward by critically interrogating the meaning of justice in discourses on the environment. According to the author, the key problem with many existing conceptions of environmental justice is that they are limited in terms of their theoretical underpinnings on the one hand, and their ability to engage with actual demands for environmental justice on the other. Thus they fail to do justice both to the variety of conceptions of justice in contemporary political theory and the attempts by activist movements to realise environmental justice in practice.

With regard to the limitations of current discussions on environmental justice, Schlosberg takes issue with two concerns. First, he is critical of conceptions of environmental justice that view justice primarily as distribution. Pointing to the plurality of conceptions of justice in contemporary political theory, he argues that the distributive paradigm, when linked to environmental concerns, must be supplemented with insights emphasising recognition, participation and capabilities as elements of justice. Second, Schlosberg...