

Politics of Identity and Liberalism

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1. Identities as political and contextual

Paul Gilbert's book *Cultural Identity and Political Ethics* represents one of the recent relevant challenges to the politics of identity, or politics based on cultural claims. Contrary to ambitions of supporters of identity or cultural politics to show metaphysical depth in cultures or identities as the ground for strong political requirements, Gilbert sees in cultures mainly a political dimension. Why do culturalists and identitists insist so much on metaphysical depth? The reason is that cultural features can be the basis for the requirement of special treatment with the strength that identitists and culturalists remark only if they refer to something deeply constitutive of people's identity, i.e. something which, if neglected, impairs the psychological functioning of individuals. However, Gilbert says, a proper discussion of the matter does not give any stable foundation for the strong claims of supporters of identity politics. In particular, what follows from the discussion is that identity is adaptable, and, so, there is no ground for the requirement to secure it in its actual form, as it is often claimed.

Gilbert's discussion leads to the conclusion that the account of cultural identity made by those who make political claims based on it depends on what purposively delimits the group. So, for example, in a particular context it is language that is taken as dominant (for example, in the requirement of

secession from a large imperial state), while religion may be dominant in a second moment (for example, because there is a new requirement of recognition inside the group that obtained its political organization after the secession from the empire). In this process, identity-group activists try to convince their members that there is a feature particularly important for them, either inviting them to a process of self-recognition, or remarking the objective importance of that feature (for example, the superiority of a moral outlook). To this, Gilbert says that “many different examples could be adduced, each advocating attachment to a specific identity as ethically required or desirable. But again it is hard to see what general arguments might be provided, and thus for each there are likely to be ethical counter-arguments for different attachments, so that no particular cultural component of identity seems ethically privileged”. (Gilbert, 2010, 63-64)

The crucial idea that Gilbert puts forward is that people are not distinguished pre-politically on the base of supposed deep objective cultural differences. This is a thesis about the relevance of cultural differences in delimiting groups in a way that has political consequences. All divisions into separate cultural groups have an external explanation related to material and political circumstances. The shape of these groups depends on such circumstances, where it is extremely important that a group is put into specific circumstances by the actions and positions of others. Gilbert describes some of these conditions. It is important to remark that the relevant opposition of Gilbert’s classification is toward doctrines that establish cultural identities on the ground of supposed deep features shared by all those who are part of a cultural group. The first circumstance that Gilbert analyzes is the one that gives ground to identity as standing. I will show briefly Gilbert’s discussion of identity as standing, because it will be relevant for the following part of the paper.

Identity as standing appears as a reaction to a form “of insecurity shared between members of some groups who find themselves treated similarly by others”. (Gilbert, 2010, 71) These people feel as being under-evaluated by others and their reaction consists in forming a view of themselves that confers self-worth. This constitutes identity as standing. By the self-perception that

results, people feel pride in themselves and “experience the self-worth of which the contempt of others threatened to deprive them”. (Gilbert, 2010, 72)

Identity as standing is the base of political aspirations that vary from the requirement of the right to regulate the life of the community according to its own norms, to that of a separate state. People do not need to have the common cultural identity affirmed as identity as standing before the identification I am speaking about, in particular not a common deep identity. They recognize each other because they feel that they share the same circumstances, i.e. the same threat.

A particularly important remark that Gilbert offers in this discussion is that, contrary to what influent authors think, the need for respect is not equivalent to that of recognition from the other group (typically, I suppose, the recognition of a minority from a majority). Respect may not be relevant, because the group fearing for humiliation may disdain the other group, and, therefore, do not find any importance in its respect. Or, the other group can recognize it by meeting its political demands, but, at the same time, not respect it. The relevant sense of respect included in identity as standing is self-respect.

With such political and contextual characterization of identity as standing, as well as of other forms of identities, Gilbert has accomplished his plan of offering an explanation and support to his claim that cultural differences are better not understood as something objective and constitutive of deep identity. Moreover, the identification of people with different groups depends on specific circumstances and on the question to which identification provides an answer.

A relevant conclusion of Gilbert’s discussion is that, because of the fact that persons do not have a deep identity in virtue of being members of cultures, there is no need for a cultural identity for their psychological functioning, and, consequently, identity has no value in supplying such a need. Gilbert explicates this position. He does not deny that cultural components are important for individual identities, in the sense of making them the sort of individuals they are. This, however, does not imply that one has identity in

terms of membership in a cultural group defined, among else, by language. Nor does it imply that even if a person has such a cultural identity, that identity has value for the person. All the value is explained by the language as such, and not by the additional fact of cultural membership. To see this, we may add the consideration that one can make use of a language without being member of the cultural group that originally or typically uses that language. The same we can say about values and other aspects of identity. An individual can take benefit of them without endorsing them so as to be culturally involved. So, for example, an immigrant can endorse the values of the people were he came to live (let's say optimistically, those of human rights) without becoming a member of their cultural group.

There are arguments denying this. These arguments insist on the impossibility of separating elements of cultures, in order to enjoy their benefits. So, for example, the value of the culture consists in being internalized and, therefore, in being able to keep people together in an integrated society. But Gilbert has a good reply to this argument: it confuses cultures and communities. The latter can be multicultural, for example.

An important consideration offered by Gilbert regards the distinction between the value of cultures for individuals, and the attribution of value to cultures. In the first case, we have a powerful requirement that concerns the protection of people in front of possible malfunctions that can threaten them. In the second case, we say that withholding recognition to cultures and related political requirements fails to give the due weight to the evaluations of adherents to cultures. This is, obviously, a less powerful requirement because of the fact that what people take to be due to them, is not necessarily due to them.

In the former case we have a potentially stronger requirement, but Gilbert says that we must assess it, and he proposes to do this by being aware of the diversity of types of identity that he has described earlier. Each type brings a different value for individuals. Let's see it on the example of identity as standing that appears as one of the possible forms of identity that most strongly answers to a basic human need, i.e. self-respect (that is, for example,

taken by John Rawls to be a primary good). Gilbert agrees that self-respect is a universal human need, but although it is, it is still questionable whether its loss is experienced when one's cultural group is devalued, and it is also questionable whether it can be answered by cultural identification. He offers an example to support his thesis: members of working class are frequently devalued by members of upper classes, but it is not their typical reaction to find an identification that valorizes them. They simply ignore the attitudes of the upper classes. In general, Gilbert says that identity as standing is a possible reaction, but not an inevitable one and it depends on various political factors. Moreover, there is no reason to think that cultural identification can satisfy a general need of self-identification. Obviously, there are people who find their source of pride in national or cultural identity, but there are people who do not feel such pride, or even feel shame for their national or cultural belonging. There are people who find different sources of self-respect, like their family, local belonging, profession, etc.

I find myself very much in sympathy with Gilbert's positions. Basically, I agree with him on the skepticism about the depth of distinctive cultural features taken as bases for political claims, where by "political claims" I refer to three possible requirements: independent statehood, autonomy in a wider state, exceptions from general legislation. More precisely, I agree with Gilbert's position in opposition to identitists and culturalists, who in one way or another, find an objective foundation of identity and a relation between deep aspects of identity and political claims.

I add some considerations to Gilbert's discussion, and these considerations regard the issue of respect and recognition, as well as the stringency of demands posed by cultural commitments. I start with the latter issue.

2. Subjective identity

My departure point is represented by Bilgrami's distinction between the objective and the subjective conception of identity. The former is identity as

how it might be seen independently of how the person sees herself, while the latter corresponds to how the person conceives herself to be. (Bilgrami, 2006) To be sure, Bilgrami's primary intention is not to relate directly to the discussion concerned with the political consequences of identity. Bilgrami is concerned primarily with the description of identity. Nevertheless, I think that his proposal has important consequences for the present discussion. I start with a brief description of objective identity.

Objective identity can match up with the conception according to which it corresponds to features that reveal the identity of the person by her external behavior. This person may not endorse this identity, but the possession of some features appear as the best explanation of her behavior, these features appear as salient, and so constitute the basis for saying that they constitute the identity of the person. In this case, identity may be present although the subject does not identify with it, or does not even give out any external behavior that reveals it. The political consequences of such a conception of identity are relevant. A group of people may feel as more competently aware of the identity of persons than those persons themselves. As such, they think that they have, for example, legitimacy to act for the achievement of autonomy and liberty of people on the base of what the self of these people really and objectively is, although these people are themselves unaware of these real and objective facts. Bilgrami offers the example of the proletarian identity in the Marxist theory, and the role of the vanguard in such a theory. Obviously, we may add the example of the role of national leaders, as well. It is such conceptions of identity and the related political projects that Gilbert's arguments successfully oppose.

For the present discussion it is more important to see the description of subjective identity that Gilbert does not discuss. Subjective identity can be important for politics, as well. It comprises some intensely held self-conception, like, for example, the strong commitment to being a member of a national or religious community. But intensity is not sufficient. One, for example, can be alienated from, rather than identified with an intense desire that she has. So, Bilgrami thinks that it is important to dissipate an ambigui-

ty, that between being aware of being something (for example, a Muslim, or an Italian), and valuing to be something. It is the latter that is relevant in the discussion of subjective identity. So, a reflective endorsement (which Bilgrami relates with second-order states of mind) of first-order states of mind (desires of something) is needed in order to identify with these states of mind.

Bilgrami wants not to be understood as offering a picture of identity that is only instrumental, i.e. of identity as something that is meant to last only so far as some goals are realized (for example, national independence). He says that identity may have a more subtle role in the psychological economy of persons. It may be a source of dignity and self-respect when one feels vulnerable, or of social solidarity when one feels alienation in a social environment. This, as we have seen convincingly affirmed by Gilbert, is not necessarily so, but it is so for many people. In such cases, says Bilgrami, it is not plausible to say that identities are endorsed only instrumentally or temporarily. They appear to agents as having intrinsic value. From the external standpoint, identities may be overturned and revised when their function is accomplished. But from the internal standpoint, they are conceived as having permanent value and not revisable. This can even assume the form that Bilgrami calls 'Ulysses and the Sirens' model'. In the example that Bilgrami offers this indicates the case of members of a community that are aware that under the pressure of new social condition they may weaken their original identity commitments. In order to prevent such possibility, they realize a politics that entrenches in their society the identity related way of life so that it survives even if their commitment to their identity will be weaker. The example shows that, from the standpoint of members, the identity features have value independently of the desires of individuals, as well as of the contingencies that originated them.

This second-order commitment is something distinctive and not related to all desires, even non-instrumental desires. In Bilgrami's example, we may value intrinsically philosophy, but not in such a way as protecting us from a possible change in evaluation, so that we ensure that we will still be working on philosophy, even if we will become disinterested about it. In general, we support our tendencies only so far as we expect to have them. Contrary to

this, in the identity example shown earlier, the support of the tendency was not offered only for the time when the tendency existed, but also for the future time when it will weaken.

Now, there is an important part in Bilgrami's discussion: "I am not saying, however, that the commitments, values, or desires upon which identities are based are immutable or primordial. Not at all. The commitments may well change. But from the point of view of the subject who has these commitments, she would like them to be permanent, even if (as she fears) the commitments are not permanent. That shows just how deep those commitments are for her. And that is why they are so suitable a basis for defining her subjective identity". (Bilgrami, 2006, 8)

At the end of the paper, Bilgrami only introduces the normative issue, i.e. the question of normative consequences of the two conceptions of identity. As he says, the problem of external and internal reasons here becomes important. External reasons put normative requirements to individuals independently of how they see the issue, while internal reasons depend on the internal normative outlook of the person. In my opinion, Gilbert has convincingly shown that identity and culturalist theories that appeal to the objective concept of identity and to external reasons fail. There are simply not objective deep identities, and, therefore, anything that supports external moral reasons that impose constraints to agents, or that supports identity and cultural oriented politics.

The question is different from the standpoint of the agent herself. As Bilgrami says, in virtue of her way of seeing her identity, it may be the source of deep commitments for her. The subject feels these commitments as a basis for political requirements, as well. Here it is important to remember what Gilbert says: what one feels as due to her is not necessarily what is due to her. But subjective identity as described by Bilgrami influences political and legal decisions from the standpoint of liberal and liberal democratic conceptions of justice. I will show now two kinds of exemplification of this.

3. Subjective identity and liberalism

For Chandran Kukathas (Kukathas, 2003), subjective commitments are politically important, because the strongest moral interest that we have is the right to live according to our conscience. As a consequence, the political order must be so structured as to permit us to live in accordance to our conscience. But this is a right that everybody equally has. Consequently, to every person it must be permitted to associate with people that share her commitments. Such a political structure includes insulated communities, each organized according to the deep commitments of its members. However, because of the fact that individual conscience is what must be protected, the groups are free associations with the right to leave the community. There is no legitimacy in protecting the community apart from what its members want. This is, in fact, a libertarian order, far distant from the identity and culturalist politics opposed by Gilbert, although it seems to me that this order is not fully positively evaluated by Gilbert, as well.

The stringency of identity and cultural requirements, as well as internal reasons is taken in serious account by authors who endorse the liberal democratic conception. I will refer to two authors, Joshua Cohen and Samuel Freeman.

Cohen compares his proposal of deliberative democracy with the aggregative model that he thinks is inferior, and one of the reasons is the limited strength the latter has in protecting some identity and cultural demands: “The problem may [...] trace to a failure to take seriously the stringency of the weight of the demands placed on the person by her reasonable moral or religious convictions – not the intensity with which she holds those convictions, which does figure in aggregative views, but the stringency or the weight of the demands imposed by the convictions, given their content. It is precisely this stringency that compels reasons of especially great magnitude for overriding those demands. But such considerations about the stringency of demands are absent from the aggregative conception; so, therefore, is the need to find reasons of great weight before overriding those demands”. (Cohen,

2009, 159-160) On the other hand, “while accepting the fact of reasonable pluralism, [deliberative democracy] is attentive to the stringency of demands to which agents are subject”. (Cohen, 2009, 160) The question now appears: why does democracy have to take in consideration the stringency of demands of morality and religion? Before proceeding, I will just briefly indicate that the fact that Cohen speaks about religion, while Gilbert about identity primarily related to national belonging is not a problem here. Cohen’s consideration can be extended to any kind of identity and cultural demand, and so is related to Gilbert’s discussion.

So, let’s reformulate the question: why does deliberative democracy have to recognize identity and cultural demands in such a strong way? As Cohen explains, deliberative democracy institutionalizes the ideal of political justification that requires that the exercise of political power must be based on free public reasoning among equals, i.e. it frames social and institutional conditions that facilitates this ideal. According to such a conception of democracy, citizens regard each other as equals, and this results in a procedure where each citizen defends her political requirements by appealing to reasons that others “have reason to accept, given the fact of reasonable pluralism and the assumption that those others are reasonable”. (Cohen, 2009, 161) It is not sufficient to appeal to reasons that one thinks are true; she must find reasons that are compelling to others, while she knows that those others can endorse alternative reasonable commitments, and she knows also something about their commitments, for example moral or religious commitments that for them are overriding.

Religious commitments are taken by Cohen as particularly important because they put demands of especially high order to their adherents. Similarly to Bilgrami, Cohen says that these adherents take these demands as true, i.e. not as self-imposed. But, importantly, he adds that as a consequence, these adherents cannot accept a policy based on reasons that impede them to respect the demands of their religion. People who think that such stringent demands are unreasonable, or who treat such demands as only particularly intense preferences show “an unwillingness to see the special role of religious

convictions from the point of view of the person who has them". (Cohen, 2009, 165) The alternative, supported by Cohen, is to acknowledge that the demands impose fundamental obligations reasonably recognized as such by the members of a religion, and to accept the duty to find reasons that may override such demands if one wants to propose a policy that restricts freedom of religion. Cohen says that one will not normally find such reasons, and this leads to the wide recognition of freedom of religion. Otherwise, equal citizenship will be denied to the adherents of religions, and there will be a failure of democracy from the standpoint of its deliberative conception.

There is, however, a specification that indicates the limits of Cohen's defense of religious commitments: "These points about religious liberty – essentially about its free exercise – do not say anything about how to handle claims for religious exemption from general obligations with a strong secular justification (including obligations to educate children), or about whether special provision is to be made for specifically religious convictions, as distinct from conscientious ethical convictions with no religious roots". (Cohen, 2009, 166) In relation to this, I say here only that (i) the mutual relation between religious requirements and general obligations with a strong secular justification must be handled case by case, and (ii) that J.S. Mill has already convincingly argued that ethical convictions with no religious roots deserve the same treatment as religious convictions. I will defend the former claim in a future work, while I think that Mill's arguments for the latter claim are still undefeated.

A position that, for the present discussion, has relevant similarities to Cohen's is the one put forward by Samuel Freeman, influenced, as Cohen, by Rawls's theory of public justification. Freeman says that "Only the most compelling reasons of justice, those regarding the protection of others' fundamental rights, should be allowed to outweigh the freedom of religious doctrine, sacraments and liturgical practices". (Freeman, 2002, 24) In Freeman's opinion, the rigid application of the liberal requirement of equal treatment can generate inequalities, because equal treatment under one law can cause unequal treatment under another law. So, for example, equal treatment un-

der the law that prohibits use of (some) drugs can generate unequal treatment under the law that ensures freedom of conscience and the related freedom of religion. This is the case of Pueblo Indians, for whom the prohibition to use peyote interferes directly with a sacramental practice. Freeman's conclusion is that there must be an exception to the general law in such case not for avoiding the damage of someone's cultural identity, but in order to respect some important right or requirement of justice. In other words, cultural identity is not affirmed as a primary bearer of rights, as culturalists or identitists say, but protection of identity claims is, nevertheless, in cases like the one indicated a strong requirement as a valid public reason. Liberalism cannot support a policy that enforces "politically the practices of any particular cultural group, it politically permits individuals (in effect) to revise their 'cultural identities'". (Freeman, 2002, 29) Here is where a liberal politics departs from culturalist and identitist politics. Nevertheless, Freeman, the same as Cohen, shows how cultural demands may have an important role in deliberation in a liberal democratic framework.

Cohen and Freeman offer a discussion that is related to Bilgrami's subjective conception of identity (although they do not indicate and do not rely explicitly on him as a source), and they underlie the importance of the subjective perspective on normative demands, identifiable with what Bilgrami, with a traditional terminology in philosophy, calls internal reasons. The subjective perspective may derive from various sources, like the contextual sources of identity that Gilbert indicates. But, independently of the origin, what is relevant, according to Cohen and Freeman, is that in a specific moment there are reasonable persons who endorse a world view that puts on them stringent requirements, and that these persons perceive these demands as authoritative. Although identity requirements are not founded by something objective and deep, they are founded by something subjective and deep. This 'subjective and deep' is sufficient to be the source of deep requirements to individuals, in the sense of strongly authoritative internal reasons, although frequently not perceived as internal by the individuals involved. When these requirements are part of a reasonable doctrine, they put limits to public legislation in the

sense that they can be overridden only by particularly strong reasons.

However, it seems to me that from the standpoint of political consequences, this is more a supplement than a criticism. What I have been describing is a limited defense of the demands of identity. Firstly, it is coherent with what is one of the main aspects in Gilbert's position, i.e. that there is not a privileged position for national identity over other forms of identities. Secondly, only reasonable identities are protected. Thirdly, group memberships are not delimited previously to what individuals endorse. The consequences of this are (A), that it is not necessary that an individual endorses the whole of the elements of a cultural world view, and (B) that there is no ground for supporting a cultural identity above what individuals want. In particular, there is no ground to support a fixed, instead of a mutable, identity, if it is not the individual herself who wants this. This, together with what Cohen and Freeman say in favor of identity protection, represents the reasonable political view about identity. This indicates that everything relevant in relation to cultures and identities is protected inside the boards of liberalism and that no specific identity and cultural politics is needed. This seems to me to correspond broadly to Gilbert's reflections at the end of his book. But there is a departure from Gilbert's view, nonetheless. Considerations on subjective depth of identity and on the stringency of identity requirements bear a normative strength that is absent in Gilbert's view.

5. Identity and self-respect

The last issue I am going to comment is that of respect, self-respect and recognition as related to cultural identity. A relevant merit of Gilbert's discussion of this issue is that of offering a more subtle distinction than those frequently endorsed in the debate, both on the side of identity and culturalist requirements, as well as of some liberal reactions on the other side.

One of such identity positions is represented by James Tully who tries to base identity requirements on the liberally recognized value of self-respect.

Tully (Tully, 1995) says that all cultures must be publicly affirmed as of being of equal value, otherwise the primary good of self-respect is threatened for the people who take part in the cultures that are disvalued. The reason is that what a person creates, as well as her life-plans, at least partly depends on her cultural identity.

Tully's position is criticized by Barry (Barry, 2001, 267-269). In his opinion, Tully understands in the wrong way Rawls's conception of self-respect, and, even worse, uses the conception of self-respect wrongly. The basic problem, as Barry says in coherence with Rawls, is that self-respect is not a good that is the object of distribution in the theory of just distribution. Among the primary goods there are the social bases of self-respect, and they are constituted by civic and political rights that are the basis of the equal status as citizens, as well as material goods by which people can realize these rights. Accordingly, there is no space for the idea that the society must be organized so that to each member it must be ensured an equal part in a good assessment of other people, independently of what other people think of other citizens and of their cultures. (Barry, 2001, 322)

There is a part of truth in Barry's argument, and that part of truth is coherent with what Gilbert says in relation to respect attributed to groups and their self-respect. Authors like Tully exaggerate in the weight they attribute to external respect. As Gilbert says in his discussion of identity as standing, the form of identity that is most nearly related to discussions about respect and self-respect, external respect is not something that is necessarily needed for self-respect: "While identity as standing is a reaction to presumed lack of respect and may lead to demands for respect it need not do so, since those from whom recognition is demanded may themselves not be respected, so that their respect is scorned. [...] It is, in fact self-respect that identity as standing seeks to secure, not necessarily the respect of others". (Gilbert, 2010, 74) Here we have a major point of agreement between Gilbert and Barry (who refers to Rawls): there is no necessity of external respect for self-respect, because self-respect can be ensured inside the narrow group to which individuals belong. I agree with them, and the discussion shows a point where the thesis of identity

politics is wrong.

However, there is a problem for the kind of liberalism defended by Barry, as well. For Barry, the social bases of self-respect are related only to civic and political rights that are the basis of the equal status as citizens, as well as to material goods by which people can realize these rights. The relevant political demands are related to these. But Gilbert correctly shows that there is a political question related to identity issues, as well: “cultural identity as standing is a reaction to another’s cultural disdain”. (Gilbert, 2010, 180) True, this reaction is not universal but contingent, but, nevertheless, it must be taken in consideration and met as an aspect of political reality. What is the proper reaction?

The solution must be based on the disentangling of two concepts that appear as fused in the debate, both on the side of identitists, as well as on the side of their critics. One of Gilbert’s major contributions to the debate is the disentanglement of the concepts of respect and recognition. Respect is equivalent to positive evaluation. Recognition is equivalent to affirmation of equal status, in the sense of equal status ensured by law and in front of law. I have shown exemplifications of recognition in this sense in the examples of Cohen’s and Freeman’s treatment of cultural requirements. What Gilbert’s debate of identity as standing shows is that what is permanently needed by groups is recognition, while respect may appear only contingently as a requirement. We may add that even when it appears, as Barry correctly shows, it cannot be taken as something due by justice. (Barry, 2001, 269-271) Moreover, such a requirement, as Barry correctly shows, is incompatible with liberalism, because a person or a group must be left free in the evaluation about whether to respect or not to respect another person or another group. On the other hand, recognition is a matter of justice, as we have seen earlier in showing Cohen’s and Freeman’s theses.

In summary, the mistake of many identity and cultural theorists (in particular, in the examples provided by Gilbert) is to fuse the issue of respect and recognition, where they think that the requirements of respect and recognition are typical and permanent in the identity issues. Gilbert correctly shows

that they are separated, and the expectation of respect is contingent. Barry correctly shows that such a requirement is even incompatible with liberalism, or, more precisely with the right of people to freely evaluate worldviews and ways of living. Here we have identified identitists' and culturalists' mistake.

However, there is a mistake on the side of criticisms of identitists' and culturalists' requirement, and Barry represents an exemplification of the mistake. The question that he correctly identifies is that of respect. But there is the other question that he does not appear to treat properly, at least in this fragment of debate. This is the question about the equal treatment of all cultures by law on the grounds of equality. There are parts of his book when he moderates the opposition between his view of egalitarian liberalism and identity and cultural requirements, but one aspect where he is irremovable is the important question of the official use of language. In general, his attitude is that equal opportunities for members of minority cultures must be ensured by offering them opportunities to learn the majority language. Although this can be the only available solution in some contexts, it cannot be taken as the only, and even not as the primary solution in all cases, as Gilbert correctly remarks: "A minority language, to take an obvious example, can put its speakers at a disadvantage in employment, participation in public affairs and so forth. Efforts need to be made to minimize these effects by normalizing its use wherever possible, including, where appropriate, granting autonomy and language protection provisions to territorially concentrated language groups". (Gilbert, 2010, 197) In practice, obviously, it is impossible to recognize always linguistic equality to all cultures. But then, a public reason sensitive to the context must be offered for why a culture (e.g. in its language manifestation) has not equal official status as other cultures. However, I think that it is needed to include in recognition more than what is in Gilbert's focus. In my opinion it is proper to extend public recognition to issues that are not related to real material interests only (as is the case of language), which, on the other hand appears to represent Gilbert's exclusive focus ("I believe that, instead of identities, real material interests should be acknowledged and arrangements made to serve them"). (Gilbert, 2010, 196) I think that in order to ensure by

law equal status of cultures, forms of symbolic recognition must be provided, as well as of recognition of traditions or rituals like, for example in the question of public holidays or gastronomic issues.

Support to identity politics in relation to self-respect is frequently opposed by remarking the dangers of such politics. As Jeff Spinner-Halev and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse (2003) say by relying on empirical analysis, building self-respect on group self-respect can be dangerous. Group self-respect is often built by neglecting differences inside the group, and by idealizing it. At the same time, there is the tendency of creating stereotypes of other groups with negative connotations. In practice self-respect built on group self-respect appears as competition and leads to group polarization.

But what is the alternative? The alternative is to neglect recognition of minorities, apart from what is related to their material interests. This can, by itself, generate or strengthen group polarization. Jose Brunner and Yoav Palev (Brunner and Palev, 1996) speak about the position of Palestinians in Israel. In part of this community what is by Gilbert called identity as standing includes, in Brunner's and Palev's description, such values as having being deported, or having been put in prison. Such strong asocial forms of identity as standing are a reaction toward the strongest forms of absence of recognition and deprivation of rights. But lower forms of absence of recognition provoke group polarization as well, although in milder forms. It seems, therefore, that public recognition of minority identities in aspects related to material, as well as symbolic needs, or needs related to rituals, is the most reasonable reaction.

As conclusion, I remark some points:

1. Gilbert successfully defeated objectivist theories of deep identity.
2. A subjectivist theory of identity that supports deep commitments of individuals can be provided.
3. This subjectivist account does not support any kind of political requirement apart from those coherent with a liberal theory of justice.
4. The political solution that results broadly corresponds to that endorsed by Gilbert, although some of the identity demands have stronger normative

power.

5. Gilbert correctly separates the notions of respect and that of recognition, and he correctly remarks the contingency of requirement of the former.

6. Forms of recognition related to material needs must be offered along with symbolic recognition and recognition of rituals of minority identities.

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