

INTRODUCTION

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On February 17 and 18, 2008 took place at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto the International Conference *Identity and Alterity in Multiculturalism and Social Justice: « Conflicts », « Identity », « Alterity », « Solution.? »*. It was organised by Professors Reiko Gotoh and Paul Dumouchel, in the context of a research project on the relationships between social justice and multiculturalism. When we organised it, choose its themes and determined its structure we had three goals in mind. The first one was to enquire into the ways in which the two issues of identity and alterity appear from the different points of view of social justice and multiculturalism. That is to say, if 'identity' for example, is a central concept in reflections on multiculturalism, an issue that is intimately related to the demand for equal recognition of minority groups, it also plays a central role in social justice. That role however, and its importance remain less evident, because claims for social justice often take for granted the cultural unity and political equality of those on the behalf of whom they are made. In other words theories of social justice frequently assume the shared identity of those involved in the redistribution scheme or include it as if it were an unproblematic requirement. One of the consequence of this is that in theory the question very often does not appear, the issue is simply ignored, while in practice important minorities may turn out not to be entitled to any succour. A somewhat similar displacement, though its content is different, takes place in relation to the concept of 'alterity'. Both theories of social justice and of multiculturalism are normative theories of

justice directed towards the claims of underprivileged groups. Yet how does being a member of a cultural minority relate to being a member of a disadvantage group? Clearly these two ways of dividing the world into privileged and underprivileged, dominant and subaltern groups overlap to some extent, but they cannot be perfectly superposed. How is this partial coincidence to be understood in relation to our conception of justice? What place is there, for example, for those who are disadvantaged because of reasons related to health, in either and in both theories of social and of multicultural justice?

Our second preoccupation concerned the issues of conflicts that arise in relation to demands for social and multicultural justice, as well as that of their possible solutions. Because of the partial superposition between these two approaches it is often possible for the same social situation to be framed either as a question of social justice or as related to multicultural justice. What difference do these alternative ways of presenting the issue make in terms of the nature of the conflict and its resolution? Alternatively there are cases in which, clearly, either way of describing the issue, taken in isolation, is inadequate; in such cases in what way do these two dimensions of problem interact? What are the consequences of this complexity on the possibility of resolving the conflict?

Our third and last objective was of a different kind. We wanted this conference to be an occasion for young scholars from various countries to have the chance of presenting their ongoing research and of interacting with each other. The preoccupation with multiculturalism is a relatively recent one compared with questions of social justice, which are at least as old as welfare economics. The latter became viewed as central to the stability of the modern nation state immediately after the end of the Second World War. The rise of multiculturalism, as both a political and a theoretical issue, must be understood against this background. Rather

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than as the sign of a return to a pre-modern tribal attitude, as they have sometimes been understood, demands for multicultural justice, should be seen as attempts, however confused at times, to deal with the profound transformation of the world that we are witnessing. In other words, the issue is unlikely to go away, and, what is even less likely to disappear, is the discussion, dialogue and debate, between multiculturalism and social justice, because more than any one issue taken in isolation, it is the tension between these two ways of addressing questions of justice that reflects the ongoing transformation of the world. Young scholars, students and postdoctoral fellows, are the thinkers of tomorrow. They are the ones who, more than us, will be called upon to address the problems and difficulties that accompany it. We therefore sent out a call for paper aimed at young scholars and received numerous submissions from Canada, China and Japan. The conference itself was divided in four sections "Alterity", "Identity", "Conflicts" and "Solutions?". Each section contained accepted papers on its specific theme. The papers were followed by a commentary that was given either by a senior Professor or by younger scholars. Commentators were Professors Yoshikushi Koizumi (Ritsumeikan University), Noah McCormack (Ritsumeikan University), Masachi Osawa (Kyoto University), Nana Sato-Rossberg (Tsinghua University) and Shigeki Tominaga (Kyoto University). The conference opened by the keynote address of Professor Han Kyung-Koo from Kookmin University in Korea and Professor Nagao Nishikawa of Ritsumeikan University kindly accepted our invitation to give the closing conference. With students from four different countries we succeeded in having a multicultural conference on multiculturalism.

In closing both organisers wish to thank everyone who helped make this conference a success: all of those who submitted a paper, even if we could not accept every submission; the speakers and commentators

and our two guest lecturer; as well as the members of the staff of the University's research center for their logistic support and the many students who made sure that everything went smoothly during those two days.