

Reading/Discussion Questions for November 19

17.042 Citizenship and Pluralism

1. Okin argues that “there is considerable likelihood of tension” between multiculturalism and feminism. What exactly is the tension?
2. Why, in Okin’s view, have defenders of minority group rights neglected the tension between multiculturalism and feminism?
3. How does Okin conceive of the relationship between culture and gender? Is Okin right that most religions and cultures are patriarchal, and have “as one of their principal aims the control of women by men” (p. 13)? Are her examples convincing?
4. Do you agree with Okin that women who belong to a “more patriarchal minority culture” might be better off if their cultures were to become “extinct” or to be “integrated” into the majority culture? (p. 22-23)
5. Why, in Pollitt’s view, have cultural rights movements centered on gender?
6. In what ways are multiculturalism and feminism allies, in Kymlicka’s view?
7. Honig argues that western societies should take “the perspectives of new immigrants” into account “when passing judgment on their illegal acts” (p. 36). Why is this important?
8. Al-Hibri argues that Western feminists aim of saving women of minority cultures from internal oppression at the hands of their religious and cultural groups is “condescending, even patriarchal” (p. 44). What does she mean by this?
9. According to Tamir, the use of the term “survival” in the debate over group rights is common. Survival of what exactly? What is wrong with casting the defense of group rights in terms of survival?
10. One of Parekh’s criticisms of Okin is that she “fails to appreciate the full force of the challenge of multiculturalism and the opportunity it offers to liberals to deepen and enrich their self-understanding” (73). What exactly does multiculturalism reveal about liberalism, in Parekh’s view? Do you agree? Why or why not?
11. Sassen argues that cultural protections should not be seen as simply a way to preserve intracultural gender inequality. Why does she think this? (Consider her point that minorities experience oppression in their interactions with the dominant culture, in school or on their jobs).
12. Nussbaum defends a “political liberal” approach to evaluating the claims of culture, which makes more room for religious believers than Okin’s “comprehensive liberal” approach. On what grounds does liberalism make room for religious believers? Do you agree with Nussbaum’s claim that political liberals should respect the Catholic Church’s refusal to hire women as priests?