Review Debate: Reply to David Goodhart and Andrew Pilkington

O'Donell, Mike

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MIKE O'DONELL

University of Westminster, UK

Andrew Pilkington is explicitly in broad agreement with several of my arguments and I believe there is more in common between David Goodhart and myself than our above exchange indicates.

We each emphasize egalitarian policies and anticipate that these could reduce inter-ethnic tension in areas of social disadvantage and so underpin social solidarity. Goodhart and Pilkington see such policies as part of a 'progressive nationalism', whereas I find inappropriate the historic and contemporary implications of the term 'nationalism' – particularly in the current context of ethnic friction. However, the three of us can probably be described as 'progressive' or 'somewhere left-of-centre' although the left/right spectrum seems increasingly opaque. We are, then, participants in an ongoing debate to define a new progressive direction – post-Blair and, it is to be hoped, post the Iraq war that has blown us so violently off course.

On the issue of multiculturalism I sit, not entirely comfortably, between the Goodhart and Pilkington positions. Not only am I positive about Britain's multicultural character, I am supportive, as is Modood and I assume Pilkington, of any *necessary* further measures to underpin it. However, I share some of Goodhart's concern about multiculturalism. Firstly, multiculturalism is inadequate to deal with current ethnic tensions and the lack of social solidarity these indicate. What is now required might better be termed 'inter-culturalism' – emphasizing debate and resolution, sharing and a degree of commonality rather than predominantly cultural autonomy and difference. Secondly, multicultural policies have contributed to substantial and apparently increasing separation (a more accurate term than 'segregation', which implies political compulsion) in education and housing as well as to considerable and dangerous cultural separation. This may not be apparent to cosmopolitan elites who may, indeed, enjoy the 'conviviality' that Paul Gilroy (2004) makes so much of, but it is obvious not only in working class but in many middle-class neighbourhoods as well. Thirdly, there is a serious reality to the 'political correctness' associated with multiculturalism and one does not have to be 'right-wing' to observe or experience it. Examples are the moralistic opprobrium aimed at those who argued that the term 'black' was inadequate to describe all 'non-white' people and the difficulty, until recently, in having an open and mutually respectful debate within the Left about immigration. There are many more insidious examples than these. Some of my colleagues on the Left can be

just as self-righteous and closed-minded as right-wing ideologues. By inhibiting free expression, political correctness can block information necessary for democratic debate and policy formation.

In his speech of December 2006, Tony Blair recognized the urgent need to balance multiculturalism with integration, although he failed to recognize the dangers to integration of his government's foreign policy or adequately to place the issue within the context of globalization. It is central to my argument that it is little appreciated that the conditions of social solidarity have radically changed in a globalized world.

A main point of disagreement with Goodhart and Pilkington is the relationship of the global (specifically, human rights) to the nation state and various, particularly ethnic, communities. In fact, the disagreement with Pilkington is much less substantive and his defence of Parekh's position on this matter makes it clear that he sees a major role for human rights in providing a broad framework of values and, I assume, law within which national life occurs. It is precisely this framework that I mean by a 'global consensus' on human rights – a working and dynamic conceptualization and practice of human rights, which is already almost universally acknowledged as desirable by nation states. It is surely imperative that those who contravene human rights should be accountable in the relevant international courts – as has often though not always been the case. I think Pilkington and Parekh agree with this.

However, I differ from Pilkington in his reading of Parekh's understanding of the relationship of human rights, nation and community (multiculturalism). Parekh's view that Britain 'should formally declare itself a multicultural society' and that 'we should think of it (Britain) as a looser federation of communities' is not the direction now needed (Parekh, 2000). At a more philosophical level, I find Parekh's frequent criticisms of Enlightenment values divisive. The values of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' should be understood and applied in context(s), but secular progressives can take pride in them as Christians do the Bible or Muslims the Qur'an. If these and other traditions can combine to construct a better, dare I say, 'more civilized' world, that is all to the good. Incidentally, it is odd that the concept of 'civilized' is often dismissed as judgemental whereas the notion of 'civil society' – from the same root – is much lauded.

Many critics of contemporary multiculturalism see British nationalism as a more unifying approach. Goodhart presents his own version of this. Given that many of the values expressed through human rights are also now 'British' values – for example, democracy and equal rights regardless of race or gender – the gap between us is perhaps less than may appear. It has been accentuated by a perceived tension between the demands of national security and human rights, which is currently unusually acute. Goodhart is more inclined than I am to give precedence to national security than human rights where there appears to be a major clash. I argue that the conflict is

greatly exaggerated and that an unequivocal commitment to human rights is likely to reassure British Muslims and to strengthen social solidarity. Further – an issue Goodhart does not pursue – a radical reorientation of Britain's foreign policy would have a more unifying effect than specifically nationalist initiatives, particularly of a 'flag-waving' kind.

Given the strength of the human rights movement across the world and the increasing realization of the need for a global framework to deal with urgent dangers to the planet, it is unexpected to find my views described as 'utopian' by Goodhart. However, Mannheim distinguishes between utopianism based on unsubstantiated idealism and utopianism extrapolated from current realities towards the making of a better world – a kind of 'idealism without illusions'. I am happy to subscribe to that kind of utopianism.

References

Gilroy, P. (2004) 'After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture'. Abingdon: Routledge.

Parekh, B. (2000) 'A Britain We All Belong To', *The Guardian*, 11 October.

MIKE O'DONNELL is Professor of Sociology at Westminster University, who has recently publshed in the areas of social theory and ethnicity. *Address*: SSHL, University of Westminster, 309 Regent Street, London W1R 2UW, UK. [email: M.ODonnel@westminster.ac.uk]