

Fallacies of Uncritical Multiculturalism. By Tibor Machan. The Freeman Ideas on Liberty. Irvington-on-the-Hudson: The Foundation for Economic Education. Pp. 134-135.

This article was written to demonstrate the potential fallacy of "true" Multiculturalism. According to the author, true Multiculturalism is by definition the unquestioning and uncritical acceptance of any aspect of any culture other than that to which a person belongs. Machan relates that diversity in common perception is benign. The author then proceeds to feed the reader a brisk and unsubtle dose of reality. Machan points out that diversity of culture can also be an extremely complicated phenomenon when viewed in a wholly practical manner. In this case, Machan's point is not to judge Multiculturalism as "inherently evil" or mistaken thinking. Rather, he suggests that "we" should be more realistic in "our" thought processes regarding Multiculturalism and all of its tenets and effects.

By raising the question of whether groups or movements such as the Cosa Nostra or the Nazi movement deserved consideration in the multicultural debate, Machan drives home both the point that unacceptable practices not only exist in different cultures, but also may be the very root of a particular culture. The author continues by raising the question of how to define "a culture". If one were to answer this question devoid of the dreaded preprogramming of ethnocentrism, then one must face the fact that unrestrained pursuit of Multiculturalism can bring with it certain risks. These risks include, in the opinion of this reviewer, the inevitable realization that in the pursuit of politically correct forms of thinking based on cultural relativism, we will have lost our ability to foster the types of behavior which have, through our own cultural evolution, been deemed acceptable and conducive to the future of this culture as a whole. Although the author appears to represent various cultures accurately, he displays a certain level of ethnocentricity and the article is written from a somewhat negative stance to Multiculturalism. The ethnocentrism of the author is noted within the confines of his belief that no one can be wholly uncritical of every other culture in the world. For example, the very individuals who demand blind acceptance of all the practices of the various and sundry cultures known to us are often among the first to raise dejected voices of outrage when confronted with cases of possible circumcision or the systematic abortion of female fetuses, practices which are acceptable in cultures other than their own. The disgust that they expressed is not what is wrong, on the contrary, it confirms that some cultures bring practices which others will find distasteful and unacceptable. Therein lies the proof that Multiculturalism is a fallacy, according to Machan. No thinking individual can blindly accept all tenets of any other culture and no matter how hard one tries to be otherwise, everyone becomes inherently ethnocentric when our own culturally installed sensibilities are threatened or offended. When these traditions are followed only in their native environment, our response should reflect that situation. Only when these practices are thrust into our culture should the ethnocentric view become an issue.

Socially acceptable behavior is the culmination of a cultural evolution sometimes requiring thousands of years. Our own codes of behavior are no different, in that they stem from a long standing Anglo-Judaic practices which have allowed western civilization to flourish as few others have in the history of humankind. These practices must not be thrust aside for the sake of quieting the politically correct thought police. Neither should we ignore that ours is a culture that prizes and respects the various views of others. Ours can be seen as the compilation of many practices derived from a diverse and wonderful array of other cultures. Within any thinking society, however, one must recognize that not all cultures are inherently seeking, nor are they worthy of, our unqualified acceptance.

The author's point is that to be a thinking and open-minded individual one must make oneself aware of the various practices of other cultures. One should attempt to place a value on them based on the place that each practice holds within the culture and environment from whence it arose. Further, to do so, one must attempt to evaluate these practices unburdened by the ethnocentricity that will surely tint and twist one's finding

findings. To extoll the virtues of various benign and likable cultural practices without recognizing that no culture is void of unsavory and often “terrible” practices, is to be intellectually lazy and contradictory.

Machan’s article will undoubtedly be considered troubling by many because of its content and frankness. This reviewer happens to agree that it is written in a “brutally” blunt style. However, the author’s style must not be allowed to sway one’s attention away from the fundamental truth to be found within the article. That truth is that all cultures bring with them both benign and “ugly” practices. One must make an wholehearted attempt to recognize that these practices have their place in the respective cultures and that acceptance is complicated when these practices are brought into one’s own culture.