

Barry's criticisms of Multiculturalism

We have read two similar but slightly different versions of "multiculturalism"

Parekh: Equality requires that societies make accommodations to the practices of minority cultural and religious groups, in recognition of the cultural aspect of human nature.

Taylor: (1) There is a human need for recognition for one's distinct identity; cultural identity is part of that distinct identity; therefore we should accord cultural recognition to individuals and the groups of which they are a part. (2) The state should protect and help to maintain minority cultures that are threatened by normal operations of that society.

BARRY is an "egalitarian liberal" (EL). The first means he believes in a (much) greater degree of equality in socio-economic standing than currently exists in the United States and the UK. The second is what is called "American liberalism" on the Taylor I, II handout, essentially the view that only individuals, not groups, have rights and deserve state protection.

Barry provides both *criticisms* of multiculturalism and *defenses* of egalitarian liberalism, though most of one also serves the other.

1. *the equality criticism* (63-64): extreme economic inequality is a much more serious problem than cultural recognition or maintenance; concern with the latter has diverted attention from the former.

2. *collective goals criticism* (64-68): It is not appropriate for a democratic liberal state to grant rights or recognition to group goals, including cultural maintenance, protection, or expression. Only individuals can have rights, and individuals should have the exact same rights independent of their group identities. Cultures do not have rights.

3. *defense of EL* (68-71): At the same time, it is not correct to portray liberalism as hostile to group difference and group identities, as Taylor sometimes implies. Giving rights solely to individuals does not mean groups cannot maintain themselves. Liberalism simply provides a common framework for groups to coexist under common laws; it just will not use the state to support those groups pro-actively. If people voluntarily choose to join groups or to sustain groups into which they are born, the liberal egalitarian state will not aim to undermine those groups.

background on "assimilation". This term is used in different ways by different writers we have read, and indeed by Barry himself in different places:

Callan ("Ethics of Assimilation"): abandoning a culture and identity into which you were born in order to adopt another one (generally of the dominant group in your society). Barry, on p. 72, adopts this definition but notes that the assimilation in this sense might not be successful in the sense that the dominant group might still not accept the minority group (example of Jews in Nazi Germany [p. 73]).

Alcoff (from Ramos): A mixture of different racial and cultural elements with none dominating

Barry: On p. 80, Barry uses a different definition of "assimilation": The adopting of a common national identity without requiring the abandoning of an original cultural identity. It is helpful to distinguish this from 2 other ideas:

Acceptance or "*ratification*" (p. 73): when a dominant group accepts a minority group

Acculturation: one group becoming more similar to another group. (So acculturation is on the way to assimilation)

Integration: a minority group becomes part of the mainstream economic and political life of the nation, but with no implication regarding whether it adopts the culture of the mainstream or retains its own original culture. (That is, in theory a group can integrate without either assimilating in Callan's sense, nor even acculturating.)

4. *The assimilation criticisms*:

a. (72-76): Multiculturalism assumes that assimilation (one group giving up its culture and its identity) is a bad thing; but it is not a bad thing in its own right. It is only bad under certain conditions, e.g. if forced upon the assimilating group. Barry points out that a group can become assimilated without *trying* to do so; it can just happen "naturally" (75). He thinks there is nothing wrong or bad about this [Barry's stance on the assimilation question is similar to Callan's, in "The Ethics of Assimilation."]

b. *defense of EL* (77-81) Independent of this point, civic nationalism (Barry's favored type of national identity, which he connects with EL) does not require assimilation but is consistent with cultural plurality (which he misleadingly calls "additive assimilation," where the group adds a new national identity onto its original cultural identity {this is what Du Bois was calling for for African Americans})(81). Civic nationalism involves loyalty of all citizens to common institutions, political ideals, and a sense of the common good that transcends the good of one's ethnic group, as well as a degree of economic equality also. But it allows cultural groups to retain their original cultural identities, and so not to be assimilated.