

Barry's criticisms of Multiculturalism

BARRY is an "egalitarian liberal" (EL). The "egalitarian" part means he believes there should be a (much) greater degree of equality in socio-economic resources, opportunities, and standing than currently exists in the United States and the UK. (The inequality can be expressed in various different ways – e.g. gap between wealth and income of the wealthiest and the middle/median, or wealthy and the poor; the proportion of upper income and lower income students at selective colleges; the wage differences in typical firms between top executives and the average worker. Barry gives statistics of this kind.) The (philosophical) "liberal" part 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 characterizes this form of liberalism using Taylor's phrase "difference blind." Barry provides both *criticisms of multiculturalism* and *defenses of egalitarian liberalism*, often both.

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. (Inequality is much worse in both those countries than when Barry wrote his book in 2001, in relation to all the measures Barry cites.)
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. So Taylor is wrong to see the "Canadian model" as a true form of philosophical liberalism. True liberalism must be "difference blind."
3. *defense of EL* (68-71): Although the liberal state does not grant public recognition to groups, 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. If individuals do not voluntarily sustain groups and the identities connected with them, the liberal state has no problem with that either.

background on **assimilation**. This term is used in different ways by different writers we have read, and indeed by Barry himself in different places. This can be confusing, since author A can be against assimilation and author B can be for it, but they can mean different things by "assimilation" and so they are not necessarily disagreeing. Here are some of the meanings we have encountered.

Callan ("Ethics of Assimilation"): abandoning a culture and/or identity into which you were born, in order to adopt another culture/identity (generally of the dominant group in your society). Barry, on p. 72, adopts this definition but notes that assimilation in this sense might not be *successful* in that the dominant group might still not accept the minority group (example of Jews in Nazi Germany [p. 73]). Barry calls such acceptance "ratification." I think Callan implicitly includes ratification as part of what he means by "assimilation," although he does not articulate this distinctive process.

Alcoff (from Ramos): A mixture of different racial and cultural elements with none dominating. (Callan's and Barry's uses are much more like each other than either is like Alcoff's.)

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. (This is "civic national identity" rather than "ethnic national identity," in Frederickson's distinction.)

It is helpful to distinguish this from 3 other ideas:

Acceptance or "ratification" (p. 73): when a dominant group accepts a minority group (see Callan discussion above)

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. Doing so is consistent with the minority group *either* adopting the culture of the mainstream (Callan's meaning of "assimilation") *or* retaining its own original culture.

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 only bad under certain conditions, e.g. if forced upon the assimilating group (following Callan, Barry calls this "assimilationism.") So Barry distinguishes 3 different processes by which a minority group can assimilate: (i) Assimilationism. (ii) Group voluntarily chooses to assimilate. (iii) Group becomes assimilated without *trying* to do so; it just happens "naturally" (75). Barry thinks there is nothing wrong or bad about (ii) or (iii).

b. defense of EL (77-81) Independent of this point, civic nationalism does not require assimilation but is consistent with cultural plurality. 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 (see 81). (Barry somewhat misleadingly calls this process “additive assimilation.” This is misleading because the national identity that the minority group adopts is not a cultural one but a political one. But “additive acculturation” implies that a cultural identity is being added to another cultural identity. This can definitely happen – an example often given in the U.S. is when African Americans are able to negotiate “white” culture when that is appropriate, while not losing their own African American culture. But this is different from the political point Barry seemed like he was making about a national political identity. (Think about Du Bois in relation to this.)