

Philosophy 104, Ethics, Queens College, Spring 2005
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Lecture Notes, March 16

I. Criticism #4 of Aristotle's Virtue Ethics: Virtues will vary from society to society, from individual to individual.

It depends on your moral starting point.

Aristotle had slaves, and thought women were mentally inferior to men.

This is an eliminable element, like the claim that all virtues are means between extremes.

That is, one could strive for universalism within virtue ethics, a universal set of virtues.

But this would destroy the advantage of considering one's moral starting point.

We proceed to MacIntyre's defense of patriotism as a virtue.

II. Contrasting virtue ethics with liberal morality

MacIntyre counterposes two competing moralities: patriotism vs a 'liberal, impersonal' morality.

His use of 'liberal' is not meant as in current political climate.

It is a historical use, referring to defenses of individualism and liberty.

Both Kantian and utilitarian ethics are liberal, in this sense.

MacIntyre is attacking the universalizability aspect of traditional moral theory.

He presents five clauses of liberal morality, p 414:

1. Rationality
2. Interest neutrality
3. Way-of-life neutrality
4. Individualism and Impartiality
5. Abstraction

III. Two problems with liberal morality

1) Conflict of interest

E.g We both want the last oreo, or the Falkland Islands, or Iraqi oil.

We can either impose force, or appeal to impartial standards (e.g. GHP, or CI).

Force abandons morality.

But what motivation do I have to subordinate myself to impartial standards?

That is, if I am to sacrifice, I should have some motivation.

But in important moral cases, this is exactly what's missing, pp 417-418.

2) Dissolution of social bonds

We need armed forces.

But the only reason for men and women to join is if they value their country over their own lives

“Good soldiers may not be liberals,” p 418.

They may not think for themselves, or look to impartial standards.

(The oddity of ‘An Army of One’ marketing.)

Liberals undermine this kind of bond.

For the liberal, impersonal morality, where and how we learn morality are as irrelevant as where and how we learn math facts.

These social bonds are in fact constitutive of morality in the first place.

Morality comes from family and community.

Also, the goods are defined by our community: how I live, what I value.

Motivation and prevention of mistakes both come from the community, p 415.

IV. MacIntyre’s argument in favor of patriotism

1. The rules of morality are only understood via a particular community.

2. The justifications can only be made within a community and with reference to the goods of that community.

3. Only the community can provide moral sustenance.

So, without this community, “I am unlikely to flourish as a moral agent”.

This yields a loyalty which means that I should adhere to the community above any impartial standard.

Note that virtue ethics, thus, is a fundamentally irrational position. p 416.

We place our country, if not necessarily its current political leaders, beyond rational criticism.

(In some fundamental way of understanding the nation as a project.)