

Philosophy 104, Ethics, Queens College, Spring 2006
Russell Marcus, Instructor
email: philosophy@thatmarcusfamily.org
website: <http://philosophy.thatmarcusfamily.org>
Office phone: (718) 997-5287

Lecture Notes, March 15

I. Quiz: How are virtues means?

II. 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.)

III. MacIntyre's story of our lives argument

We can only understand our lives in the context of the stories we tell about our lives, see p 417.

Patriotism is the kind of virtue that arises from taking seriously our moral starting points.

The liberal conception ignores these facts, about family and community, when deciding moral questions, p 416.

IV. Virtue ethics summary

Kant and Mill sever morality from self-interest.

Aristotle tries to derive Kant/Mill-style morality (justice) from self-interest.

But the Ring of Gyges shows that this is fruitless.

MacIntyre says that shows that the Kant/Mill-style morality is wrong.

We should not strive for an impartial ideal of justice which transcends our community.

V. Introduction to Justice

We are now broadening the moral questions: How shall we live, together?

We will attempt to answer the following four, specific questions:

- 1) What justifies the rule of a government?
- 2) What justifies property ownership?
- 3) Why do people form societies?
- 4) What are the limits to governmental rule of law?

Also, we will see that these answers lead to one more moral theory.

VI. Hobbes's first law of nature

Hobbes starts with a discussion of good and evil, p 2.

He is a moral relativist, or perhaps a nihilist even.

Still, there are natural laws, which are laws of reason.

They are derived from empirical premises, unlike Kant's moral law.

Law #1: In the state of nature (war) every man has a right to everything.

So, people naturally pursue government in order to protect themselves and their property.

VII. The state of war

Everyone is basically equal.

We are completely free, and self-governing.

That's the good news.

The bad news is that life in such a state is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short," p 4.

There is no justice or morality.

Everyone can break promises, contracts, without fear of repercussion.

Even if you have something, you can always worry about some one taking it away from you.

Locke uses this concept, too, though he uses the less drastic term, 'state of nature'.

VIII. Hobbes's second law of nature

If we were living in this brutish state of nature, it would be natural to seek peace.

We would be willing to do whatever it takes to get this peace, including giving up our natural freedom.

Law #2: In order to achieve peace, we are willing to give up our freedoms, keeping only as much as we want others to have.

This second law is derived from the first, p 5.

Note the guiding principle of the golden rule, here.

We give up as much liberty as we are willing to give to others.

Also, compare with Mill's Harm Principle, which we will read later.

Our limited freedom is a consequence of our desire for peace and stability.

But this is not enough.

Even if we were willing to give up our liberty, it is possible that others will take advantage of us.

In the state of nature, there is no notion of justice, or morality, generally.

These only make sense in society.

We need something to ensure that our sacrifices will not be in vain, that others will keep their promises.

IX. The commonwealth

A commonwealth arises from the appointment of a leviathan, or absolute ruler.

(A leviathan is actually a giant sea beast.)

We all cede our rights to govern ourselves, as one, in favor of an outside ruler with total control, p 7.

Without ceding all rights, we have no assurance that the contract will be upheld.

Thus, a government is justified by the agreement of a group of people to submit their will to a single rule.

We have to have a single rule, to act as the voice of the people.

Once we have this single will, then contracts can be enforced.

Then it makes sense to enter into contracts.
And breaking a contract is what Hobbes calls injustice.
Thus, we have an account of the origin of morality, as well as the rule of law.
It is universal, in the sense that it holds for everyone within a civil society.
But it does not depend on anything like natural rights.
It is just derived from bare claims about the natural state of the world.

X. Locke argues that morality transcends the contract

Locke believes that we have natural rights before the contract situation.
These extend into the contract.
Thus, morality transcends the contract.

For Hobbes, we obey the rule of law in deference to the force of government, the power of the leviathan.
It seems that this entails that if you get a bigger army, then it's acceptable to break the law.
Consider militias.
Outside the agreement, as between states, there is no morality.
All we have is a state of war.

For Locke, the reason we obey the law depends on his view of the social contract.
This is a hypothetical contract, an agreement of individuals to abide by the decisions of the government.
For Locke, our antecedent agreement, along with the presence of morality outside the contract, binds us.
Locke on the Social Contract, p 345.
We are naturally free.
But we consent to give up our rights, for protection.

XI. Locke, on the state of nature

We have perfect freedom, though not license.
We are still constrained by moral law.
We may not kill each other, or selves.
We also have perfect equality.
We are all equally permitted to punish violators of the moral law, p 343.
This is for both reparation and restraint.
That is, we may protect our property and act to re-gain what has been lost.