

Lecture Notes

Baier, "What Do Women Want in a Moral Theory?"

Baier begins by citing a list of prominent contemporary women philosophers who are interested in morality: Anscombe, Wolf, Murdoch, Foot (Nussbaum curiously absent)

-Worth noting that there are prominent women philosophers who are interested in defending more traditional kinds of moral theories: Korsgaard, Herman, Driver (is Nomy is a crossover?)

If we take Carol Gilligan's suggestion (that women think differently than men), then we might ask ourselves: How do women think about morality?

2 questions: What do women want in moral philosophy?

-easy to answer: just read the available literature to find out

Harder question: What do women want in a moral theory?

-harder to answer, because none of the philosophers above gives or purports to give a comprehensive alternative to Kant, Mill, etc.

Baier doesn't argue that women *should* offer moral theories

-she leaves open the possibility that reductionist, systematic thinking may ultimately be rejected (and on legitimate grounds) in favor of a more "mosaic" style of describing morality

Major crits of "male moral theories" is that they neglect love, caring

-New moral theories shouldn't entirely reject the things that older theories get right; rather, they should build on them

-So to bring male and female thinking together, it would seem, would involve incorporating both an account of the role of *love* and the role of *obligation*

-Baier claims that obligation is the primary preoccupation of male moral philosophers

Why is a theory that focuses exclusively on obligation not enough?

-Obligation-centered theories can't account for their own sustainability

-they fail to explain obligations to *morally educate new members of the moral community*

-in short, they can't explain why we have obligations to attend to the moral upbringing of children (or who might have these obligations)

Ex: War orphans who grow up without any love later have no sense of obligation (for truth-telling or promise keeping, let's say)

-Who has failed in their obligation here? Anyone?

Ex: Parents who *try* to instill moral values in their children, but fail

Bad parent case-Suppose you come to believe that you will not be a ‘good’ parent, in the sense that you will not be very successful at instilling moral values in your children.

-Why might parents like this threaten the moral community?

-Because they make the community *less morally inclined* across generations

-In order for morality to sustain itself, it needs to explain how it will be preserved across time.

-An obligation-based moral theory will have to explain the response to the bad parent case in terms of obligation

-But what kind of obligation could we say that the bad parent has?

-Two options: Sterilization or abortion

-Not good, *prima facie*, because it doesn’t seem right that men should be obligated to become sterilized, nor does it seem right that women should be obligated to have abortions (at least not simply in virtue of the fact that they won’t be any good at instilling moral virtues in their children)

-Current liberal moral theories avoid this problem only by ignoring the question of who is responsible for moral education

Challenge: Why not require sterilization or abortion? What exactly is the problem with biting the bullet here? I can only imagine that something like “love” will be the response, but the obligation-based theorist need not care about that.

So what kind of alternative can we use to bridge the gap between obligation-based and caring-based theories?

-Trust

-Also mediates between reason and feeling

-Notice what it means to trust: You don’t quite *believe* in the trusted person, but nor do you necessarily feel any emotion toward them

Why should this bridge the gap?

-Trust is required for all loving relationships, as well as for loyalty

-Challenge: Is this right? Do you have to trust the people you love? Can’t we ever meaningfully say “I love you, but I don’t trust you?”

-Response: love is not *warranted* in this case

-Trust can explain obligations, too

-“To recognize a set of obligations is to trust some group of persons to instil them, to demand that they be met, possibly to levy sanctions if they are not, and this is to trust persons with very significant coercive power over others.”

-The morality of obligation is covered by the morality of proper trust “in as far as (the latter) reduces to the morality of coercion”

-Challenge: Baier seems to conflate judgments about what is right with judgments about what we ought to do in response to wrongdoing. These are separate issues. I can recognize that you are doing something wrong, without thereby becoming justified in any kind of intervention.

Case: The Sensible Knave

-Imagine a competent adult who fails to sympathize with others when he does them wrong. Is there any way to get this person to see that he should not ignore moral condemnation?

-Baier thinks not. She thinks that you can only nip this problem in the bud, during the “morally formative stage”.

-Implication: You can't make an immoral adult moral. Is this right?

A paradox of trust: “Our confidence may be, and quite often is, misplaced. That is what we risk when we trust. If the best reason to take such a risk is the expected gain in security which comes from a climate of trust, then in trusting we are always giving up security to get greater security, exposing our throats so that others become accustomed to not biting.” (275)