

Practical Reasons for Particularism

Duisburg-Essen University

14th June 2013

09.00-10.30	Maike Albertzart (HU Berlin)	<i>Moral Principles and Practical Reasoning</i>
	Respondent	Ezio Di Nucci
10.30-11.00	<i>Refreshments</i>	
11.00-12.30	Simon Kirchin (Kent)	<i>Particularism and Thick Concepts</i>
	Respondent	Neil Roughley
12.30-14.00	<i>Lunch</i>	
14.00-15.30	Jörg Schroth (Göttingen)	<i>Particularism and Applied Ethics</i>
	Respondent	Oliver Hallich
15.30-16.00	<i>Refreshments</i>	
16.00-17.30	Constantine Sandis (Oxford Brookes)	<i>Virtue Ethics and Particularism</i>
	Respondent	Tobias Gutmann
18.30	<i>Dinner</i>	

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Arguably, recent debates on ethical particularism have shown that the main argument for the particularist position advanced by Jonathan Dancy doesn't prove what it is supposed to prove: holism in the theory of reasons is, contrary to what Dancy claims, compatible with the formulation of moral principles. In spite of this result ethical particularism still seems to be an attractive position.

The suspicion motivating this workshop is that it is the putative practical roles of moral principles that generate the deepest worries pushing in the direction of particularism. Kant thought of the Categorical Imperative as a guide to our actions; Mill held that his Principle of Utility can be used to track the correct solutions in difficult cases; today, philosophers like Singer, Gewirth and Gert give principled answers to the question of what we should be doing.

It is here that the particularist raises a series of incisive questions: what are the arguments for the claim that we really need such principles notwithstanding the fact that many morally competent persons have never heard of them? Aren't they superfluous if all we need to judge correctly is acquaintance with the moral concepts, thick and thin, which we may learn just by adopting our language? If principles are necessary to justify our moral judgements, doesn't this lead to scepticism, since virtually no competent judges are able to make them explicit? And why do so many moral philosophers believe that there must be moral principles, whilst epistemologists and philosophers of science scarcely ever defend the claim that we need analogous forms of orientation in order to attain knowledge in non-practical spheres?

The focus of the workshop will be on the strength of such practical considerations as justifications of particularism and on the resources the principled ethicist has to counter particularist conclusions.

Speakers

Maike Albertzart (Humboldt University, Berlin)

Simon Kirchin (University of Kent)

Constantine Sandis (Oxford Brookes University)

Jörg Schroth (Georg-August-University, Göttingen).

Organisation

Tobias Gutmann and Neil Roughley