

A Different Kind of Patriotism

by Igor Primoratz

It is not uncommon to defend moderate forms of patriotism, but does such patriotism have positive moral significance? Igor Primoratz argues it does not, but he thinks we may sometimes have a moral duty to be patriots of a different sort: ethical patriots.

According to a widespread view, a stable and well-functioning liberal democracy is not possible without the ethos of patriotism: without the identification of the population with their country, the loyalty of citizens to their polity, a special concern of the individual for the well-being of his country and compatriots, his polity and fellow citizens. Patriotism is accordingly widely thought to be morally valuable, and indeed required.

On the other hand, critics of patriotism have argued that patriotic partiality is but collective egoism, at odds with impartiality that is an essential feature of morality, and incompatible with the requirements of universal justice and common human solidarity. Another standard objection to patriotism is that it generates dislike of and hostility to other countries and peoples, encourages militarism, and makes for international tension, conflict, and war.

Extreme and Moderate Patriotism

One strategy of countering these criticisms focuses on the distinction between two types of patriotism: extreme and moderate. While extreme patriotism, encapsulated in the saying 'My country, right or wrong', is indeed vulnerable to these objections, a different, moderate variety of patriotism is not. Moderate patriotism, which has been spelled out and defended in the writings of American philosopher Stephen Nathanson, acknowledges the constraints on one's loyalty to one's country and compatriots, one's polity and fellow citizens, imposed by the principles of universal justice and basic human solidarity. A moderate patriot's partiality is given expression only within the bounds laid down by considerations of universal morality. His is a middle-of-the-road position between the radical partiality and unconditional loyalty of extreme patriotism and the unflinching, sweeping impartiality of universalism and cosmopolitanism. In this way the moral legitimacy of patriotism is secured by setting moral limits to its pull, without changing its contents.

Ethical Patriotism

There is, however, another, more radical strategy of defending patriotism against moral criticism: one that



does not merely rein in the pull of patriotism, but rather provides it with a different content. For both the extreme and moderate varieties of patriotism aim at defending and promoting the *worldly*—political, economic, and cultural—interests of one's country and compatriots. The difference between them is the length to which this will be done: an extreme patriot will ultimately go to any length for the sake of the *patria*, whereas a moderate patriot will acknowledge that universal justice and common human solidarity set limits to what may be done for its sake.

What might be termed a distinctively *ethical* type of patriotism would no longer focus on objectives such as the country's political power, riches, or cultural vibrancy—things that constitute the country's well-being in a worldly, non-moral sense. Instead, it would be concerned primarily with the country's distinctively moral well-being, its moral identity and integrity. A patriot of this sort would not express her love for the *patria* by seeking to husband her country's resources and preserve its natural beauty and its historical heritage, or make it rich, powerful, culturally preeminent, or influential on the international scene. Instead, she would want to see to it that her country lives up to moral requirements and promotes moral values, both at home and internationally. She would be investing time and effort into building and preserving a just and humane society at home, and making sure that

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her country also acts justly beyond its borders, and that it shows common human solidarity towards those in need, however distant and unfamiliar they might be.

In addition to these concerns for the moral integrity of her country at present, she would also be concerned for its past moral record and its implications for the present. She would support, and perhaps initiate, attempts at exploring the darker chapters of the country's history, acknowledging the wrongs perpetrated in decades or centuries past, and responding to that past in appropriate ways, whether by offering apologies or making amends, and by making sure such wrongs are not perpetrated yet again.

This is not to say that an ethical patriot would be indifferent to her country's worldly well-being. But unlike a patriot of the usual, mundane sort, she would not seek to promote it for its own sake. She would be concerned for her country's economic prosperity or political power to the extent that they are prerequisites for the country's laws, institutions, and practices being just, and its policies responsive to the requirements of universal human solidarity.

To be sure, a patriot of this, distinctively ethical type would want to see justice done, rights respected, basic human solidarity at work at any time and in any place. But her patriotism would be given expression in her special concern that her country be guided by these moral principles and values, a concern more sustained and more deeply felt than her concern that these principles and values should be put into effect generally. Indeed, she would feel that her own moral record and her own moral identity are inextricably interwoven with those of her country. This, and the absence of special concern for the worldly well-being of her country as something to be promoted for its own sake, is what makes her patriotism different from the moderate version of the more popular, mundane love of country.

Unlike a patriot of the more worldly type, an ethical patriot would not feel great pride in her country's mundane merits and achievements. However, she would be proud of the country's moral record, when it is such that it can inspire pride. But her patriotism would be expressed, above all, in a critical approach to her country and compatriots. She would not deny, justify, excuse, or belittle her country's unjust or inhumane practices, laws, or policies, whether at home or abroad, as a patriot of the more popular type is much too prone to do. On the contrary, she would feel entitled, and indeed called, to submit them to critical moral scrutiny, and to speak and act so that they may be identified, acknowledged, and dismantled. She would not shirk her part in collective moral responsibility for wrongs present or past, but would rather willingly shoulder it. And she would act accordingly.

The Moral Status of Moderate Patriotism

It is not difficult to concur with Stephen Nathanson, who finds extreme patriotism morally untenable, but defends its moderate version: a patriotism that is universalisable and constrained by considerations of impartial morality. However, there is a lack of clarity on his part about just what it is his arguments establish. For to show that moderate patriotism is not morally unacceptable is not, as Nathanson sometimes seems to assume, to demonstrate its positive moral import: to show that it is morally mandatory or, alternatively, that it is not obligatory, but is morally valuable or virtuous if freely adopted.

Elsewhere I have discussed a series of arguments for the view that moderate patriotism is a moral duty—the arguments from common moral belief, gratitude, reciprocity, utility, identity, and moral growth and sustenance—and have found them all unconvincing. The fact that a moral belief is widely shared is no proof that it is valid. The view of patriotism as a duty of gratitude is undermined by the fact that many of the benefits the individual receives from his country are not gifts, but rather a matter of give and take. The argument of reciprocity relegates beyond the pale those who are most in need of special concern: those who, through no fault of their own, have nothing to contribute to the common enterprise that is their country. The commitment to one's country and compatriots grounded on utility will be thought much too weak by any patriot worth his salt. The argument of identity trades on the ambiguity of the phrase 'my country'. The argument of moral growth and sustenance makes moral education the be-all and end-all of the individual's moral life, whereas it can turn out to be only its starting point. I have also taken a critical look at the claim that moderate patriotism is a supererogatory virtue and have found that line of argument, too, implausible, relying, as it does, on what William Godwin called 'the magic in the pronoun 'my''. That suggests that moderate patriotism lacks positive moral significance and that we have no moral reason for adopting it.

Is there something to be said for the distinctively ethical type of patriotism I have just sketched? Do we have reasons for adopting it? I think we do have at least three such reasons.

The Moral Status of Ethical Patriotism Being Best Placed

The first argument for adopting the distinctively ethical type of patriotism is simple and obvious. By and large, I am better placed to determine what is right and what is wrong, to judge it accordingly, to propose ways and means for setting it right, and to implement the solutions proposed, at home, among my own, than abroad, among foreigners.

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I am more likely to be aware, and to have a lively appreciation, of the injustice or lack of compassion in a practice of my own society, than in a practice of another, more or less distant and different society. I am in a better position to identify unjust or inhumane laws and policies of my own polity, than such laws and policies of other, more or less distant and different countries. My moral judgment will be both better grounded and more discerning when exercised on a subject more familiar and better understood than when pronounced on matters about which I may know little and understand less. (To be sure, it is sometimes claimed that membership of a society or culture may have a stunting effect on an individual's ability to understand the immorality of certain acts, policies, or practices of that society or culture. But even if that is true, surely such cases are exceptions, rather than the rule.) My moral criticism stands a better chance of being heard, understood, and appreciated at home than abroad, by my own people than by foreigners. Last but not least, my efforts to find like-minded people and, together with them, to set right a wrong, to put an end to an unjust or inhumane practice, policy, or law, are also more likely to succeed in my own country, among my compatriots, than in some other, far-away place, among strangers. And many, if not most, of the moral issues that need to be addressed and settled in a society or polity can

in any case be addressed and settled only by members of that society, citizens of that polity. Nobody else can really do it for them.

My moral criticism stands a better chance of being heard, understood, and appreciated at home than abroad.

Benefits and Solidarity

Normally, when someone is wronged, someone else benefits from that wrong in some way. When a society maintains an unjust or inhumane practice, or when a polity enacts and enforces an unjust or inhumane law, or lays down and implements such a policy, at least some, and sometimes many of its members reap benefits from it. Sometimes such a practice, legislation, or policy relates to or affects people beyond the country's borders; in such cases, the whole society or polity may benefit from it.

In all these cases, the responsibility for the injustice or lack of basic human solidarity lies, in the first instance, with those who make the relevant decisions and those who implement them. It also lies, in the second instance, with those who give support to such decisions and their implementation. But some of it also lies with those who have no part in the making of the relevant decisions or in their implementation, nor even proffer their support, but accept, rather than merely receive, the benefits such a practice, law, or policy generates. These are fairly

straightforward types of collective moral responsibility. Collective moral responsibility may also encompass those who have no part in designing or putting into effect immoral practices, laws, or policies, do not support them, nor benefit from them, but do benefit in various significant ways from being members of the society or citizens of the polity at issue. These benefits may, but need not be of the usual palpable sort. One may derive considerable psychological benefit merely from membership in and identification with a society or polity: from the sense of belonging, support, and security such membership and identification afford. It seems to me that if people accept, rather than merely receive, such benefits, that, too, generates collective moral responsibility.

It may be thought unduly harsh to talk of collective responsibility for some wrongdoing in cases of individuals who make no causal contribution to that wrongdoing, have no influence on its course and no way of putting an end to it. But, of course, I am not suggesting that they are responsible in the same way and to the same degree as those who make the relevant decisions, those who implement them, or those whose support makes the decisions and their implementation possible, and that they are as blameworthy as those others. I am only saying that, by virtue of their support of those wrongdoings and their perpetrators, even if that support is causally impotent, or by virtue of their acceptance of benefits from the wrongdoings or from their association with the wrongdoers, they too are implicated in those wrongs; they too accrue a degree of moral responsibility and they too are among those properly blamed for them. Their share of the overall responsibility for the wrongs at issue is of course lesser and the blame to be laid at their door is lesser too—but they still bear some moral responsibility and deserve some moral blame on that account. They cannot very well say, 'Those wrongs have nothing to do with us! We are in no way implicated in them!'

Furthermore—although I am less confident about this than about the preceding cases—it might be argued that independently of any benefits involved, sheer solidarity with one's society or polity is enough to implicate the individual in collective responsibility for immoral acts or practices of others in which she is otherwise not implicated. The kind of solidarity I have in mind involves a community of interest, a common lot, and bonds of sentiment. It is fairly reliably indicated by vicarious pride and shame.

If so, then I have a reason to develop and exercise a special concern for the moral record, the moral identity and integrity of my country and compatriots. I ought to be concerned about immoral practices of my society, immoral laws and policies of my polity, since they tend to impose collective moral responsibility I, too, have to shoulder. I ought to be concerned that they should be identified, acknowledged, and dismantled, and that their

harmful effects should be redressed. By doing so, I will also be concerned for an important aspect of my own moral identity and integrity.

Democracy

The preceding two arguments hold generally, irrespective of the system of government. In general, I am in a better position to attend to the moral record of my own country, than to judge and amend unjust and inhumane practices, laws, and policies of foreign countries, whether the system of government of my country is democratic or not. If my country has such practices, laws, or policies in place, and I knowingly and willingly benefit from them, then I, too, may well share the collective responsibility for them, whether the system of government is democratic or not. I may share this responsibility even if I do not benefit from them, but do benefit from living in the country and being its citizen, or if I feel and show solidarity with my country and compatriots, whether the country is a democracy or not. But if I am a citizen of a democracy, I have an additional reason to adopt the distinctively ethical type of patriotism: to cultivate and exercise a special concern for the moral well being of my country and compatriots.

In a democracy, sovereignty rests with the people. The government passes laws and decides on policies on behalf of the people. It is the people who are ultimately responsible for those laws and policies. When they are unjust or inhumane, the moral responsibility for the injustice or inhumanity lies with the people. That means that it lies with all full-fledged citizens of the polity, for it is on their behalf—on behalf of all of them, and thus of each one of them—that these laws are passed and enforced, these policies designed and implemented. If I am a full-fledged citizen of a democracy, I have a reason to show concern about such laws and policies different and, other things equal, stronger than my concern about immoral laws and policies of other countries. For they are laws and policies of my polity, designed and put into effect on my behalf too. They generate collective responsibility of all citizens, myself included.

It might be objected that this claim is too sweeping: that responsibility for laws and policies of a government can be ascribed only to those who voted for it, but not to those who voted for the opposition. If those latter had prevailed, the laws and policies would have been different. But although this counterfactual may well be true, it is not enough to get those who voted for the opposition off the hook. For taking part in democratic elections does not commit me to the outcome if my position prevails, if my

party gets to govern the country; it commits me to whatever government gets elected and whatever laws and policies it puts in place. Democracy could not function in any other way. Therefore, even if I had voted for the opposition, the government that got elected is, in the relevant sense, my government. My vote, although cast for the party that lost, authorized the party that won to act on my behalf too. Accordingly I, too, have a share in collective responsibility for what it does. My own moral identity and integrity is bound up with that of my government, my polity.

Of course, I can refuse to share the responsibility for an unjust or inhumane law or policy of my government. I can dissociate myself from it. I can protest against it and work in various ways to change it. I can do so even if I voted for the current government in the last elections. But this does not show that the claim that citizens in a democracy are collectively responsible for the immoral laws and policies of their polity was indeed too sweeping and must be qualified. For those who take up this option are actually living up to their collective moral responsibility for their polity—they are acting as ethical patriots.

Conclusion

None of the arguments sketched in the preceding section severally, nor all of them jointly, succeed in establishing a duty to be a patriot in the pertinent, ethical sense that holds universally, admitting of no exceptions. The individual is normally particularly well placed to submit her own country and compatriots to sustained moral scrutiny and criticism, and to do something about the moral lapses and outright wrongdoings this scrutiny brings to the fore. Accordingly, she ought to make use of this opportunity. But she can also come to the conclusion that her country is, morally speaking, beyond the pale, and decide

I ought to be concerned about immoral practices of my society, since they tend to impose collective moral responsibility I, too, have to shoulder.

to dissociate herself from it. By disowning her country, she also casts off the duty of special concern for the country's moral well being. The individual may well be benefiting from his country's unjust or inhumane practices, laws, or policies, or at least from being its citizen. Acceptance of these benefits entangles him in collective responsibility for those

practices, laws, and policies. But there are also those who reap no benefits from the injustice or inhumanity with which their country treats others and, in general, receive much less than their fair share of the benefits the country produces and distributes. The dis-advantaged and alienated, obviously, should not be expected to be patriots of any sort. As for the argument from democracy, individuals and whole sections of the population may refrain

from taking a significant part in the political life of their country, and in particular from voting. Those who do have no part in collective responsibility for the unjust or inhumane outcomes of the political process on this count, and therefore need show no special concern about them.

There is thus no moral duty to be an ethical patriot binding all and sundry. Nor is there a moral duty to be a patriot of the other, mundane sort. On the other hand, this other, worldly sort of patriotism comes naturally to many of us. Or, at the very least, many of us are neither disadvantaged nor alienated, and find it natural and appropriate to think of our country as home and of its inhabitants as, in some significant sense, 'our own', to identify with our country and compatriots, to participate in the political life of our country, to accept various tangible and intangible benefits of being its citizens, and to understand who and what we are, in part, in terms of these thoughts, feelings, and actions. What I hope the arguments for ethical patriotism I have sketched do establish is that *if* one as a matter of fact thinks and feels about one's country and compatriots in this way and acts

accordingly, *then* one has the duty to show special concern for its moral well-being, its moral record—that is, to be an ethical patriot.

Sources used in the preparation of this article include:

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The disadvantaged and alienated, obviously, should not be expected to be patriots of any sort.

CAPPE News

Then & Now

Many of our loyal readers will remember early editions of *Res Publica*, which was launched by what was then the Centre for Philosophy and Public Issues at the University of Melbourne in 1992. Our aim in producing *Res Publica* reflected the purpose of the Centre generally, which was to stimulate and inform debate surrounding contentious issues within the public sphere, and to encourage critical philosophical engagement with the ethical dimensions of those issues. Much has changed at the Centre since the early days of *Res Publica*, but the fundamental nature of our work, and its underlying purpose, has not.

The most significant change to have occurred during *Res Publica*'s lifetime was the award in 2000 of an Australian Research Council (ARC) grant for the establishment, under the ARC's Special Research Centre scheme, of the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics (CAPPE). CAPPE brought together the complementary strengths of the Centre for Philosophy and Public Issues—the first centre of its kind in Australia—and the Centre for Professional and Applied Ethics at Charles Sturt University. Last year, the Australian National University joined Charles Sturt and Melbourne as a third partner in the Centre, further adding to CAPPE's resources and expertise.

In June members from all three divisions met in Canberra to discuss their collaborative projects, and to reflect on how CAPPE has evolved over the years, and our plans for the future. 2004 has been, and will continue to be, a busy year for CAPPE. Below are just a few of the major events on our calendar:

2004

- *Business, Economics, & Ethics*

In June CAPPE and the International Society of Business, Economics, and Ethics (ISBEE)

co-hosted the third ISBEE World Congress at the University of Melbourne. Program highlights included Professor Peter Singer's paper, 'Producing and Sharing Global Prosperity'.

- *Nanotechnology*

In July CAPPE convened a round table discussion of the ethics of nanotechnology. Leading scientists, policy makers, industry representatives, social scientists, and philosophers met in Canberra to discuss the public interest issues raised by technology which allows the production of nanoscale (molecular level) devices. Visit <http://www.abc.net.au/science/news/stories/s1160631.htm> to read Anna Salleh's report for the ABC's 'News in Science'.

- *Fighting 'Dirty': Torture in the Defence of Freedom?*

On the 24th & 25th of August CAPPE will host a workshop at the University of Melbourne for applied philosophers working on the intersections between politics and morality. The workshop will conclude with a panel discussion on the use of torture in what has been described as 'the war on terror'. The panel discussion is free, and open to the public. For more information, see the back page of this issue of *Res Publica*.

- *Religion and Government Welfare Services*

On 23rd September CAPPE at Melbourne will convene a workshop considering the issues which arise from the provision of government welfare services by non-government religious organisations.

- *Bioethics & The Sorting Society*

CAPPE at Melbourne will host a one day bioethics conference, 'The Sorting Society', on 15 November.

Radical Politics in a Liberal Democracy

by Janna Thompson

What contributions do radicals make to the political life of a liberal democracy, and what dangers do they pose? Janna Thompson addresses these questions, and considers ways of alleviating the dangers without eliminating the benefits of radical politics.

Defining Political Radicalism

'Radical' is a word that gets tossed around and it would be useful to begin with an explanation of what I mean by it. A political radical is a person who believes that the institutions of society, or the way of life of its people, are profoundly corrupt, unjust or immoral, or bad in some other way; believes that it is possible for people to live and relate to each other in a way that comes closer to his or her ideal of a good society; and engages in political activity with the objective of achieving this end. Radicals as I conceive of them are idealists, and they are also activists. They think that their times are out of joint and that they are people who can do something to put them right.

It is true that many people do not think of radicals as idealists; and some radicals deny that they are. Sometimes radicals are presented as people who engage in destruction for its own sake, and although I think that it's possible for radicals to be nihilists, I also think that most of them are not. Even those who think that presently existing institutions must be totally destroyed usually regard such destruction as necessary for the birth of a new social order. Some radicals, traditional Marxists being the prime example, deny that they are pursuing ideals and prefer to present themselves as the servants of the forces of history. But this idea of what they are doing is not only unattractive (as many people have pointed out), it is also untrue. It is fairly obvious that Marx and most Marxists have always been motivated by ideals, that they think that the overthrow of capitalism will bring about a society in which workers will no longer be subject to exploitation and misery and everyone will be able to satisfy their needs and live a fulfilled human life. Nowadays, when the forces of history are not moving in the way that Marx expected, the need for Marxists to appeal to such ideals has become more obvious.

The ideals which motivate and are used to justify radical politics are various. Marxists want to bring about a classless communist society; anarchists, a stateless society; radical environmentalists a society in which people will live in harmony with nature; some radical feminists, a social and political world in which gender has no significance. For a long time people have become accustomed to regarding radicalism as a left wing phenomenon. But it has become clear that radicalism is not confined to the

left. For example, fundamentalist Christians and Moslems are sometimes political radicals who believe that their society, or the world as a whole is fundamentally corrupt, immoral and godless, and act to bring about an order in which people will live according to the laws of God.

It is possible for people to be radical about just one thing—animal liberation, for example. But the radical point of view tends to be global. Radical environmentalists, for example, think that it is impossible to concentrate simply on saving the environment—for, as they see it, the causes of environmental destruction are deeply embedded in present political and social institutions, and environmental ills and other social evils are intrinsically connected. Radical environmentalists tend to become global social radicals: advocating fundamental changes in economic and social relations.

Political radicals, as I conceive of them, are political activists. They are not content to complain about the ways in which present political and social reality falls short of their ideals. They join movements, they engage in political action as a means of realising their ideals or at least getting closer to their realisation. Since there is for radicals a huge gap between the real and the ideal, the question of what ought to be done looms large in radical discourse. In some cases, there is no obvious difference between the politics of radicals and those who regard themselves as social reformers. Radicals may believe that they can gradually change the system, particularly by participating in democratic politics. Or they may decide that for the time being, small steps are all that can be taken. However, radicals generally believe that existing political and social institutions, and not just particular



political leaders or parties, stand in the way of the realisation of their ideals, and so they look for some way to shake up these institutions, or appeal to the people of their nation directly, or to force their ideals onto the political agenda. Radical politics tends to be unconventional politics in one way or another. Indeed, radicals may think that it is justified to break the law to advance their cause; some believe that only revolution will effectively destroy the old order and make possible a new.

Is there a Place for Radical Politics in a Liberal Democracy?

I have offered a general definition of radicalism so that I can pose, and try to answer, some general questions. What, if anything, do radicals contribute to the political life of a liberal democracy? What dangers do they pose? Is there a way of alleviating the dangers without eliminating the benefits of radical politics?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to make distinctions between kinds of radicalism. In particular, it is necessary to distinguish between radicals who are opponents of the values that liberal democracies are supposed to stand for: equality, freedom, justice, human rights, democracy; and radicals who adhere to these values (though they may interpret them differently from non-radicals). Fascists are obvious examples belonging to the first category; leftwing radicals and radical environmentalists are often in the second (though not always), but radicals who are not on the left may also believe in values such as freedom, justice, human rights, and so on. Liberal democrats are justified in defending themselves against those who are declared enemies of liberal democracy: the difficult issues are what should be done to counter this kind of radicalism, and how liberal democracy can be effectively defended without using methods that are contrary to the values of liberal democracy. However, radicals that share many of the values of liberal democrats pose a different kind of difficulty. It is much more difficult for liberal democrats to justify taking measures against them; indeed such radicals can make important contributions to the politics of a liberal democracy. Yet they have often been perceived as a threat.

The Value of Radical Politics in a Liberal Democracy

I will start with the positive. I don't think that there is much doubt that radical politics can play an extremely useful role in a liberal democracy. It is not an exaggeration to say that it plays an essential one.

I will provide two reasons for this statement. The first is this. Conditions that impact on a society and its institutions can themselves change in a drastic way, and when this happens, institutions, practices and political assumptions that worked well enough in past conditions can become dysfunctional or unjust. But most political actors

are not inclined to bring into question the institutions in which they operate, or do not dare to do so. In these circumstances, radicals who are prepared to criticise their political institutions and argue for alternative forms of organisation or ways of living can play a very useful role. If they are successful at getting their concerns on the political agenda, then they provide a dimension to the political debate that would otherwise be missing, and make it easier for people of a democracy to contemplate and accept substantial changes to their institutions and ways of life. Environmentalists have to some extent succeeded in persuading many people that sustainability has to be a goal of all political policy making.

The second reason for valuing radicalism and radical politics is that it can bring to our attention forms of oppression that the conservative or even the social reformer does not notice—oppression that is so deeply embedded in social institutions and practices that no one would think of identifying it as oppressive until radicals identify it as such; and no one would think that things can change until radicals organise to bring about change.

The secondary position of women in public and political life through most of Western history is an example of a deeply entrenched inequality which no one thought to seriously question until political radicals put forward the idea that women could and should be citizens and the social equals of men, and struggled over a long period of time to achieve that equality.

Radical politics can bring to our attention forms of oppression that even the social reformer does not notice.

Radicalism as a Threat to Liberal Democracy

It is tempting to suppose that radical politics is a threat only to those who have a vested interest in the status quo. Nevertheless, there is a tradition of political thought that sees radicalism of any kind to be a danger to liberal democracy. For example, Karl Popper in *The Open Society and its Enemies* argues that radicals are dangerous in so far as they are utopian social engineers, who are determined to makeover their society and its people to fit their vision of perfection. Others have pictured radicals as a secret society of elites who try to accomplish their political ends in an underhand and undemocratic way. These criticisms fit some radicals, but miss their mark in other cases. Many radicals are democrats; they want to bring about their ends through democratic means, or at least by persuading large numbers of people of the rightness of their cause. Nevertheless, I am going to present what I think is the rational kernel of these general criticisms of radicalism.

The Problem of Ends and Means

Radicals believe in an ideal of justice or communal rela-

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tionships but see existing institutions and ways of life as seriously, perhaps irremediably, unjust or undesirable. There is a large gap between what is and what ought to be, and the problem faced by all radicals is how we move from one state of affairs to the other. Popper is particularly worried about the fact that radicals cannot know whether their ideal is even achievable or that a particular means will achieve it or what consequences their actions will have. He thinks that radicals are reckless and irrational utopian engineers who are prepared to take others with them on a leap into the unknown, an adventure which will more likely than not have dire consequences. A piecemeal engineering approach to social change, he thinks, is more rationally respectable—since we are more likely to foresee the consequences of small changes—and is also less likely to bring about disastrous results.

One of the problems with Popper's position is that politics isn't very much like engineering.

Political actors, whether radical or conservative, are always taking leaps in the dark, and even small changes can have large consequences. Not making radical changes to political institutions could in some cases spell disaster or allow oppressive relations to continue.

Nevertheless, there does seem to be something both irrational and morally questionable about requiring people to make sacrifices for an objective that may not be achievable, especially when so many things can go wrong on the way to achieving it. Radical politics brings up more starkly than non-radical politics the problem of justifying the means that are used to reach an end. The danger is that radicals, motivated by the badness they perceive in the status quo and by the desirability of achieving their ideal, will regard almost any means as justifiable. If radicalism encourages extreme means to accomplish its end, this is a problem from any moral point of view. It is obviously a problem for those who think that no end, however good, can justify causing suffering or denying people their rights. But it is also a problem for utilitarians since the good end can by no means be guaranteed.

Most radicals do not worry very much about the ends-means problem because they do not regard themselves as an elite corps of utopian engineers; they aim to rouse the people—to obtain support so overwhelming and widespread—so as to leave little need for political violence. The idea is that if the people themselves are radical in large numbers; if there is mass participation in destroying the old social order and building the new, then not so much can go wrong, short or long term. But this idea is naive. People who are united in overthrowing those they regard as oppressors often become divided when it comes to constructing a new order and in an unstable and

difficult situation might turn with violence on each other or their neighbours. All sorts of unanticipated things can go wrong when a complex society breaks down. This does not mean that violent political actions are never justified, but it does indicate that radicals ought to be concerned about the problem of means and ends.

The Problem of Democracy

Popper thinks that radicals committed to their idea of the good society are predisposed to regard those who do not share this ideal as the enemy—as people who can legitimately be suppressed, eliminated, or 're-educated'. However, many radicals, especially those within liberal democracies, are democrats and in fact regard democracy

as essential to their political program. They do not believe in using undemocratic means of forcing people to do their will. In fact, many radicals believe that politically violent ways of achieving their end are unacceptable and unnecessary. The idea is that

if the people of present liberal democracies were able to participate fully and equally in public affairs, if the democratic decision-making process were not distorted by entrenched interests, if people were exposed to a wider range of ideas and were able to discuss these ideas among themselves, then they would accept socialist, or anarchist, or environmentalist, or moral ideals, and as citizens would act accordingly, peacefully changing their society into something closer to the ideal.

Such democrats, it seems, cannot be accused of authoritarian elitism. Nevertheless, there is an obvious problem. Supposing the people, even after they have been exposed to socialist, anarchist, environmentalist, etc. ideals, do not become socialists, anarchists, environmentalists, or moralists. There is after all no guarantee that they will do so even under the best conditions for propagating a particular radical agenda. Democracy is a process; it cannot guarantee any particular outcome. In fact there is reason to believe that liberal democracy will not deliver the outcome that some radicals want—at least not without radical alterations to democratic institutions. For example, deep ecologists believe that nature is valuable in its own right and that social institutions and ways of life should be changed so that this value can be properly respected. But nature is not represented by democratic institutions, and so long as people regard democracy as a means for protecting their interests, it seems unlikely that the value of nature will be taken into account in a liberal democracy in the way that deep ecologists think it should.

But if democracy does not seem likely to deliver the outcomes that radicals want, then they are in a difficult position, conceptually as well politically. They can abandon the hope that their ideals will be realised; they can

*Democracy is a process;
it cannot guarantee any
particular outcome.*

abandon their commitment to democracy; or they retain this commitment, but insist that democracy, as it is, is hopelessly corrupt or inadequate. But if they take this third option, then they face the problem of how to force people to be free (in Rousseau's words). If this cannot itself be accomplished democratically, then it seems that once again their commitment to their ideals and their commitment to democracy are in danger of parting company.

The Problem of Dissent

Suppose that a particular group of radicals does win the battle of democracy and that a majority of people in a society are converted to a particular radical ideal. However, there is bound to be a minority who are not converted and whose interests will be harmed by the social changes which this ideal requires. It is tempting to believe that this minority consists of oppressors whose interests as oppressors do not have to be taken into account. But this assumption cannot be made. The problem is that most ideals are in one way or another contentious. There are going to be some people who cannot be persuaded to accept them, or who have contrary ideals. Moreover, ideals, even when they are widely accepted may not be free of oppressive implications. Post-modernists point out that ideals are inextricably bound up with practices and understandings which marginalise some people or some concerns.

Moreover, it could be argued that the project of converting the institutions of a liberal democracy to conform to an ideal is contrary to the proper nature of a liberal democracy. Rawls thinks that justice and law in a liberal society should be founded on what he describes as an overlapping consensus: ideas about just relationships that groups with different ideals and doctrines of the good can all endorse, each from its own point of view. So if one group were to insist on reconstructing the society according to its values, then this would be contrary to the very idea of political liberalism, as Rawls understands it—even if this group consists of a majority of the people. Similarly, many political theorists think of a liberal democracy as a pluralist society held together by compromises and accommodations between various interest groups. So it could be argued that if one group, however large, were to insist on having its own way, this would violate the understanding on which society is based. The complaint, according to both arguments, is that political radicalism, even if it pursued in a democratic way, is contrary to the nature and/or fundamental values of a liberal society.

These arguments bring up issues that need to be discussed at some length. I will not do so. But I want to put forward several reasons for thinking that this critique of radicalism is problematic. First of all, a group with a radical ideal isn't a special interest group that wants to get its own way at the expense of others. It is introducing ideas into the political arena which it thinks ought to be

considered and debated by *citizens*—that is by members of a society who can be expected to have a concern for their nation and the well being of others in it. To present democratic politics as if it were simply a contest between interest groups is I think mistaken. Second, I do not think that any concept of a liberal democracy is acceptable that rules out the possibility of citizens debating and making decisions about contentious value issues. If that is so, there is no fundamental opposition between liberal democracy and radical politics. But a worry remains. Liberal democracies may often make decisions that are contrary to the values of some of their citizens. What is crucial is the protection given to the interests of minorities—including those minorities that do not accept the ideals of the majority. The fear is that radicals, convinced that their ideal is right, would not be inclined to provide this protection for those who do not share their idea of the good.

To present democratic politics as if it were simply a contest between interest groups is mistaken.

Ideals and Goals

Radical politics makes important contributions to a liberal democracy, but it brings with it some serious dangers and temptations. These dangers and temptations are not merely a problem for those who are not radicals. They are also a problem for those radicals who are committed to liberal democratic values. They suggest that radicals themselves face problems in reconciling their radicalism with their commitment to liberal democratic values. With such people in mind, I want to consider whether there is a solution to the problem: a way of alleviating the dangers of radicalism without blunting its critical force.

The problems with radicalism that Popper and others identify have to do with the fact that radicals are committed to putting their ideals into practice—their political practice is guided by their ideals. Not much attention has been given by philosophers, or by anyone else, to the question of how to be a rational idealist. Popper thinks that idealists in politics are bound to act irrationally. I do not agree. Nevertheless, I think that those whose politics is motivated by ideals ought to understand the enterprise they are embarked on and where the dangers lie. In the next and last part of this paper I am going to say something about these dangers and how to avoid them. You can regard this as a lesson in clear thinking for radicals. But not just for radicals. Non radical liberal democrats have ideals too, and are subject to some of the same temptations, particularly when their understanding of these ideals or the ways in which they apply them are called into question by radicals.

There is nothing inherently wrong with political action motivated by ideals... Nevertheless, those who engage in such politics are open to certain temptations.

my analysis. A goal is, first of all, an end that can be defined or specified with considerable precision. Decreasing budgetary expenditure or returning 60% of its normal flow to the Snowy, or giving more money to public schools are political goals. They are the kinds of objectives that can be put on a party platform. People may disagree with a politician's goals, but at least they have no problem understanding what they are. Second, goals are achievable ends. Or at least, they seem to be. Third, the means for achieving them are fairly well understood: it is reasonably clear what measures should be taken in order to achieve them. A goal in politics as in personal life is something that people can work toward and reasonably expect to achieve if they adopt the right method and are not unlucky or stupid. On the other hand, if people don't have much idea how they are going to achieve an end or aren't sure whether it is achievable, then there is something wrong about regarding it as their goal. They can however adopt it as their ideal.

Ideals have three main characteristics. They are first of all 'open-textured'. They either do not have an exact definition or their meaning is a matter of dispute even among their adherents. For example people can hold ideals like 'sustainability', 'world peace', or 'socialism' without being able to state, except in general and vague terms, what exactly they mean or what a sustainable, peaceful, or socialist world would look like. People with different, and even contrary views can reasonably claim to be environmentalists, socialists, or lovers of peace. They can engage in very different, and even conflicting, practices and yet claim to be working for the same ideal. Or they can adhere to their ideal while changing their understanding of what it is. Almost all socialists used to believe that socialism was incompatible with a market economy. Problems encountered by socialist economies changed the minds of many of these people. They now believe that a market is an allowable, perhaps necessary, part of any economy. But they have not given up thinking of themselves as socialists. This flexibility is not possible in the case of goals. If people profess to have the same goal but differ in their understanding of it, we are going to think that their goals are really different; if a

I will begin this lesson by making what I think is a crucial distinction between goals and ideals. Once again I am going to engage in some linguistic legislation: in ordinary usage the two terms are not so clearly differentiated as in

person changes his understanding of his objective, we are likely to regard this as a change of goals.

The second important feature of ideals is that they have a transcendent relation to practice. People can hold an ideal and yet believe that it can never be fully realised, or at least that it can't be realised at present. Or they simply may not know whether its achievement is possible. This need not stop them from holding it as an ideal.

The third feature of ideals is closely related to the second. There is often no obvious or unproblematic way of achieving an ideal. An idealist may have no clear idea how she should proceed. Holding an ideal does not commit people to a particular course of action; and indeed may be compatible with adopting very different courses of action. No definite prescriptions follow from the acceptance of an ideal. The difference between an ideal and goal in this respect can be illustrated by reference to what philosophers call the utility principle: the idea that you should act to maximise happiness. Utilitarians understand this as a goal: you should calculate the amount of well being you could produce by each possible course of action, compare the results, and do the action which will produce the most well being. Of course, in many cases (particularly political cases) you will have no idea how much bad or good a particular action would produce or how to compare different kinds of goods or bads. In such circumstances it would probably be better to regard increasing well being as an ideal rather than a goal. If you are serious about this ideal you will do things that seem likely to increase well being but you will not regard yourself as committed to doing something that you don't know how to do: namely to maximise well being.

I think it is fairly obvious that the objectives held by radicals should be understood as ideals, in the sense above, rather than goals. Their objectives are likely to have at least one of the features that I have attributed to ideals. They are generally open textured: they cannot be given a precise definition or their meaning is a point of contention even among people who subscribe to them. They tend to have a transcendent relation to practice: radicals who are being honest will mostly have to admit that they do not know if their objective is achievable or in what form. And radicals generally have no clear, rationally defensible, idea of how their ideal can be realised, and thus there will be no one, definite course of action that their ideal commits them to.

There is nothing inherently wrong with political action motivated by ideals. Indeed, I have already explained how people with radical ideals contribute to democratic politics. Nevertheless, I think that those who engage in such politics are open to certain temptations and prone to certain confusions. It could be said that they often fail to recognise just how radical their politics is—how different from political action directed toward realising goals.

Some of the temptations arise from the very nature of ideals. The open-textured and transcendent nature of ideals combine to make belief in them irrefutable. The failure of concerted attempts to make any progress in achieving an ideal may be discouraging, but this is a different matter. Since believers don't have to think that their ideal is realisable here and now, or can change their idea of what it means, even total failure leaves it untouched. Max Weber makes this point about true believers in syndicalism:

One may use the most cogent arguments to show the convinced syndicalist that his action is not only socially 'useless' in that it does not hold out any prospect of success in changing the external class situation of the proletariat, but will undoubtedly make that position worse by creating a 'reactionary' mood: he will still see absolutely no force in such arguments, if he is really committed to his view down to its ultimate consequences.

The syndicalist would remain committed to his ideal, Weber is suggesting, even if the workers that he is trying to liberate were to reject it. Weber is loath to call the syndicalist irrational. He is rational, he thinks, in his own terms, but 'his kingdom is not of this world'. Nevertheless, this description indicates where the problem lies.

A political program can only be regarded as practical if what happens in the world provides criteria of its success or failure. Since ideals can always be insulated from refutation, it is tempting for radicals to refuse to accept any setback as reflecting on their objectives. But since political action takes place in the real world, and not in an other-worldly kingdom, to persist in the pursuit of an ideal in the face of rejection and failure is not only a recipe for endless frustration, it can give rise to one of the dangers that I discussed earlier: a disdain for the people who refuse to accept the ideal and thus a willingness to ignore their suffering or their democratically expressed preferences.

To fall back on the irrefutability of their ideals is a tempting move for radicals. Radicals have to be stubborn people because it takes a lot of courage and stubbornness to stand up to the opposition and ridicule that they commonly face. People can invest a lot of their lives in radical politics, and do not want to admit that they have been wrong. The solution is not to do what Popper seems to prefer: to pursue a politics of goals rather than ideals. I have explained why I think that taking radical ideals out of politics would be a bad thing. Rather I think that we should turn our attention to the question of how radical idealism can be rational—how it should respond to the vicissitudes of political fortune.

In fact, the open-texture and transcendence of ideals provide a number of *rational* ways in which an idealists can

respond to failure or rejection in the democratic process. They can decide that their understanding of the ideal ought to be revised and thus change their conception of what they aim to achieve. The fact that ideals are not precisely defined or have a fixed meaning makes such changes possible. Or they can decide that the ideal is unrealisable, or at least that it can't be realised at the present time. Either way, a rational radical will adjust her idea of what can be achieved and adapt her strategy accordingly. She will look for ways in which progress can be made toward the ideal, or ways in which it can be partially realised. She might try to bring about reforms that could make her ideal realisable sometime in the future. These responses are, or can be, rational ways of being guided by ideals in practical reasoning. Indeed, the transcendent and open-texture of ideals, and the fact that they do not require any particular course of action can encourage thoughtful, intelligent, and creative responses to contingencies.

Another temptation which radical idealists must guard against is to misconstrue their ideals as goals. One of the aberrations that this mistake leads to is sectarianism: an insistence that a particular interpretation of an ideal is the correct understanding, or that a particular strategy for realising it is the one true path. Popper's utopian engineers make the first mistake. Marxists have often made the second: Marx kept his descriptions of the socialist society appropriately fuzzy but unfortunately he insisted that his ideas about achieving socialism were scientific and this encouraged himself and his followers to believe that his theory provided the right strategy for bringing socialism into being. Sectarians ignore the fact that ideals generally are contentious—even among those who are sympathetic to them—and that there is no obvious path to their realisation. Since sectarian pronouncements are not self-evident and cannot be founded on reason, they have to be taken on faith. Thus sectarianism inevitably leads to splits and enmities among those who share the same ideals.

If the mistake of treating ideals as if they are goals is avoided, then it is possible to make use of some of the advantages associated with ideals—advantages which can be turned to politically productive uses. People who are guided in their thought and practice by ideals, and do not mistake them for goals, have reason to be open-minded and flexible, modest and prudent. For as rational people they have to acknowledge that they do not know to what extent their ideals are realisable or what strategy is likely to be most successful. They have to allow that

The transcendent and open-texture of ideals...can encourage thoughtful, intelligent, and creative responses to contingencies.

others who profess the same ideal may understand it differently, and that there may be no way, at least at present, of determining whose understanding is superior. Since idealists cannot be precise about their objectives, and ought to have a flexible view about practice, they are not in the position to insist that everyone who shares their ideal has to believe exactly the same things or to have the same ideas about strategy. Consensus about these things, if it ever occurs, is something for the future, and meanwhile it is probably going to be better for more or less like minded people to work together on reforms or measures that most can agree are leading in the right direction. Rational idealists have good reason to promote coalitions and ‘united fronts’ and to make common cause concerning some matters with people whose ideals are not the same.

The nature of ideals requires that idealists exercise a certain amount of prudence. They have to recognise that their best efforts to realise an ideal may not succeed, may even be counter-productive, or at least have unintended and undesired consequences. This is a good reason for being flexible and not taking too many risks—particularly in cases where the welfare of others or their rights are at stake. Being prudent means, for one thing, taking only those steps toward an ideal which are fairly certain to make people better off and not violate their rights. It would be imprudent (as well as immoral) to pursue an ideal by making people worse off on the grounds that this will lead eventually to its achievement. This does not mean that a radical is limited to advocating and working for small changes to the status quo. Being prudent and going in for what Popper describes as piecemeal engineering are not the same thing.

Another temptation that idealists should avoid is to insist on holding out for perfection: that is, to refuse to engage in

any activity that stops short of realising the ideal. One problem with such a refusal is that there may be no action that will lead directly to the realisation of the ideal. If the ideal can be achieved at all, it may require many small steps—each of which brings about changes which open up opportunities for further progress. More important, refusing to take these small steps may result in your doing nothing in pursuit of your ideal or only things that are likely to be counter-productive and provide no benefits to anyone.

So much for this lesson in clear thinking for radicals. My hypothesis is that the problems that radicals pose for liberal democracy stem not from their idealistic politics but from a failure to appreciate what kind of politics idealism requires. Operating with ideals requires prudence, flexibility, an open mind and a willingness to make common cause with others. If radicals are prudent then they are not so likely to take actions that will result in failure or suffering. If they are flexible, open to criticism, willing to ensure that their politics can have some good practical effects, and prepared in doing so to make common cause with others, then there is no incompatibility between radical politics and the values of liberal democracy. Such radicals are not the opponents of the open society. They are valuable citizens of it.

This article is a slightly modified transcript of a lecture given by Janna Thompson at the Australian Catholic University’s Melbourne campus on 16 June 2004 as part of the ACU school of philosophy public lecture series.

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The problems that radicals pose for liberal democracy stem...from a failure to appreciate what kind of politics idealism requires.

A Price on Everything? Ethics and the Widespread Application of the Money-Metric

by Adrian Walsh

Adrian Walsh considers the ethical implications of assigning monetary values to an increasing range of activities and goods.

We inhabit a social world in which an ever-increasing array of things are assigned a cash-value. Even if they are not going to be bought and sold, many activities and objects that we would once never have considered as having a monetary component are now routinely assessed in financial terms. Thus we have studies of the monetary value of volunteer work, national parks, amateur sport, and raising children, as well as more obviously economic things. This process is most evident in cost-benefit analysis, a practice that involves a systematic attempt to calculate the financial costs and benefits of any actual or proposed course of action. And where actual market prices aren't available because the good is not, as a matter of fact, bought and sold, then 'shadow prices' are assigned to the things under examination. These are arrived at through surveys which ask respondents what they would be willing to pay to either save or obtain a thing. Using these techniques, nearly all things are given (or can potentially be given) a cash value.

However, many of us feel a great deal of unease about this extension of pricing to nearly all areas of human life. The issue I want to explore here is whether there is any genuine moral content to that unease. *What might be the ethical import of assigning cash values?* What would be wrong with placing a price on everything? I suggest that the widespread extension of the money-metric does raise genuine moral problems and below I isolate three elements of the extension of money-measurement that have ethically significant implications. I begin with the most commonly discussed objection which concerns the *incommensurability* of many morally important things.

Monetary Commensuration and the Incommensurable

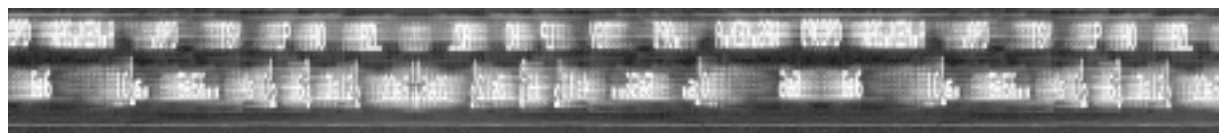
One key feature of money-measurement is that money provides us with a *universal measure* for comparing things, that we might think of as a 'supervalue'. With the

supervalue of price we can locate goods on a common scale of value from greatest to least. In so doing cash values 'commensurate'.

Commensuration has, of course, been a subject of much philosophical debate over the past decade. There has been an inordinate amount of discussion on whether or not there are things that are 'incommensurable', that is, which cannot be compared with one another. According to the incommensurabilist, for some pairs of goods we cannot use the predicates 'greater than', 'less than', or 'equal to', to describe the relationship between them, for that would require that they lie upon a common scale. As an example they might point to the futility of attempting to assess the relative merits of the creative works of Beethoven and Picasso. The claim here would be that the answer to such a question is indeterminate since their works are neither better than, equal to nor less than each other. Critics of this position argue, amongst other things, that any difficulty in evaluation here is simply a matter of our incapacity to make the judgement in question rather than reflecting some deep incommensurability. Or alternatively, as evidence of the comparability of goods, they point to our ability to make choices when faced with difficult options.

This idea that some things are beyond comparison is typically read—which the foregoing should indicate—as a *metaphysical* claim about ethical value; the nature of some bundles of things is such that they cannot be compared with one another. But there is also a specifically *ethical variant* of this idea that focuses on the morally significant violation a universal system of comparison would bring in its wake. To commensurate all things on

The widespread extension of the money-metric does raise genuine moral problems.



Raz argues some things are ‘constitutively incommensurable’... to attempt to commensurate them would be to do violence to their very natures.

a single evaluative scale is morally wrong, or so it is argued, since we should not even attempt to commensurate certain sets of goods, as if they were on a single scale. Joseph Raz, following this pluralist line of reasoning, argues that some things are ‘constitutively incommensurable’, for to attempt to commensurate them would be to do violence to their very natures. He uses the term to describe cases where agents

might feel indignant at the very thought of comparing and that for others to make such comparisons is to demonstrate a failure of understanding or character. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in defending the claim that there are incommensurable values, Raz employs a monetary example to illustrate his point. His discussion of ‘constitutive incommensurability’ revolves around the problem of whether one should even contemplate the price that one’s child will bring.

The background to much of this ethical debate, on both the part of Raz and other ethical incommensurabilists, has been opposition to philosophical utilitarianism. Orthodox utilitarianism, by determining the rightness or wrongness of an action in terms of the extent to which it increases or decreases utility, provides a singular metric for the assessment of actions. Any two actions or states of affairs can be compared in terms of the extent to which they promote utility and all actions and states of affairs can be so assessed. Hence, by determining the value of things in this way, utilitarianism can be said to commensurate. Pluralist critics of utilitarianism have argued that this is what is wrong with utilitarianism; value is ineradicably plural and so should not be reduced to a single ‘monistic’ scale.

But whilst the main target of criticism has been utilitarianism, clearly the line of reasoning has implications for the assignation of cash-values. Prices (either real or shadow) provide a universal and unitary system for commensurating all things. The German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel (1858-1918) eloquently captures the disconcertion many feel when, in ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’, he writes:

For money expresses all qualitative differences of things in terms of ‘how much’? Money, with all its colorlessness and indifference, becomes the common denominator of all values; irreparably it hollows out the core of things, their individuality, their specific value, and their incomparability. All things float with equal specific gravity in the constantly moving stream of money. All things lie on the same

level and differ from one another only in the size of the area which they cover.

In so far as one believes that value is plural and that to reduce such plurality to a single scale is morally pernicious, then the imputation of prices to all things is inappropriate. The upshot is that if one believes on moral grounds that we should not reduce all values to a single metric, then the money-metric is ethically pernicious.

Monetary Equivalences and Non-substitutability

Critics of price-imputing practices like Cost-Benefit Analysis have hitherto tended to focus almost exclusively on the idea of incommensurability. But there are other legitimate concerns one might have and which perhaps are closer to the everyday worries many of us feel.

Recall that one important analytic feature of money-measurement is its provision of a universal metric for commensurating. But there is more that can be said here. A further feature is that it provides us with a universal system for the positing of equivalences. With monetary values we can draw equivalence relationships between quite distinct and disparate goods. Marx noticed this in *Capital* (vol.1) when he writes:

To the owner of a commodity, every other commodity counts as the particular equivalent of his own commodity. Hence his own commodity is the universal equivalent for all others.

Simmel made a similar point when he writes in *The Philosophy of Money*, ‘By being equivalent to all the manifold things in one and the same way, money becomes the most frightful leveller’. Indeed, it is possible to draw some quite bizarre equivalences, such as how many hamburgers of a specific type might be equivalent to a particular Picasso painting.

Within such a universal system of equivalences, where all goods can be brought into equivalence relationships with other bundles of goods, it is also possible to make *substitutability judgements*. Two goods that are financially equivalent might be said to be substitutable—at least with respect to their monetary value—for one another. By placing monetary values on goods we might well come to regard any goods so appraised as being substitutable for any other goods of equivalent financial worth.

The ethical significance that one might draw here is derived from the moral notion of ‘irreplaceability’. If something is irreplaceable then its loss cannot be made good by the substitution of a good of a relevantly similar kind. For instance, one might believe that persons, or particular works of art, or environmental features are so constituted that no replacement could adequately compensate us for their loss. We might contrast this with a

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can of No Name baked beans that can presumably be substituted, if destroyed, by another can of the same kind. In the latter case there is an adequate replacement whereas in the former there is not.

The difference between the two cases has implications for how we should regard the different kinds of things. If one believes that there are some objects or activities which are irreplaceable, then it is presumably wrong to regard them as replaceable (which cannot be said in the case of the can of beans). And this is where the money-metric enters the picture. For in assigning prices to goods we provide a system of universal equivalences and open up the possibility of all goods being regarded as ultimately replaceable.

The conclusion that we can draw here is that for certain goods the assignation of cash values is morally hazardous because in doing so there is the danger that we will come to regard those goods as substitutable and this is morally pernicious since they are the kinds of things that should be regarded as irreplaceable.

Maintaining a distinction between Price and Ultimate Value

The previous concerns related directly to what we might label '*analytic*' features of the money-metric; money-measurement involves both commensuration and the establishment of a system of equivalences. Let us turn now to a concern that is less tightly or logically connected to the assignation of prices, namely the implications of the widespread usage of the money-metric for our sense that price and value are distinct. As we shall see, that it is not a logical consequence of the money measurement does not make it any less ethically significant.

One long-standing philosophical view about prices is that they do not necessarily reflect the relative *ultimate values* of things and often this is viewed as grounds for rebuke. For instance, St Augustine in *The City of God* remarks critically on a market in which a slave girl brings less money than a horse. He finds it ethically perverse that a human being could ever be considered less valuable than a horse and impugns any system of value in which such relative comparisons occur. Aquinas makes similarly motivated remarks about flour and mice; how could it be that a mouse which is animate could be worthless whilst flour (which is not) will bring a handsome price in the market place? These criticisms are predicated upon the idea of a separate non-monetary realm of value. Indeed such criticisms are only possible if the critics in question have a scale of value distinct from the values given in the market.

One might well view the maintenance of a distinction between price and ultimate value as a mark of civility. Certainly Oscar Wilde's oft-quoted remark that the cynic is a person who knows the price of everything and the

value of nothing would seem to endorse such a view. However, I want to suggest that the universal ascription of prices endangers the existence of such a distinction. In a world in which all things are given prices we open the possibility that the scale of price be identified with the scale(s) of ultimate value. By placing a price on everything (or at least an extensive range of things), and increasing the range of social life to which monetary values are given, we risk losing our sense that there is value outside the judgements of the market. This paves the way for money to become the only goal—which I would suggest involves a mistaken understanding of human purposes. As Craig Gay notes in *Cash Values: The Value of Money, the Nature of Worth* such a state of affairs 'hollows out our entire worldview depriving us of any sense that life is inherently meaningful and that it has been endowed with qualities that transcend monetary valuation'.

Gay bemoans the spread of what he labels the 'blasé attitude' which blunts our capacity for discrimination. This line of criticism he garners from the work of Simmel who claimed that such a deplorable attitude was most likely to be found in places with huge turnovers, such as stock exchanges where money is available in huge quantities and changes owners easily. In *The Philosophy of Money* Simmel notes that '[T]he more money becomes the sole centre of interest, the more one discovers that honour and conviction, talent and virtue, beauty and salvation of the soul, are exchanged against money and so the more a mocking and frivolous attitude will develop in relation to these higher values that are for sale for the same kind of value as groceries, and that also command a 'market price'.'

Once money has become an end in itself, there is the danger of it becoming the only end and of thereby evacuating any sense that price and ultimate value are distinct. Of course, there is no necessary movement towards such attitudes. The mere ascription of prices to all things does not automatically imply that one identifies price and ultimate value—rather my concern is psychological. The danger is that in a world in which everything can be given a price, we will come to regard the price as the only value to be had—and in so doing impoverish our lives.

A Mere Manner of Talking?

One response to all of the foregoing would be that it misconstrues what is going on when we assign cash values. When we impute a price we are not making judgements about ultimate values; we are not thereby scaling the

By placing a price on everything...we risk losing our sense that there is value outside the judgements of the market.

goods in terms of their ultimate worth. Consequently, we cannot be said to be making determinations about which goods are equivalent and thereby substitutable since our price ranges are not judgements of ultimate worth. According to this story, while money brings into existence both a common metric and a series of equivalences, these are not to be taken as meaning anything more than what the current market will pay. In so far as we talk of value and worth in terms of prices—which many of us in fact do—this should be read as a mere *façon de parler*. We might sometimes speak *as if* price and ultimate value are correlated, but this is a mere figure of speech. Thus cash prices should not be thought of as markers of ultimate worth and to think that they are is to misunderstand the meaning of prices.

This point is reinforced by the dominant position in modern economics, neo-classical price theory. In contrast to earlier classical theorists such as Ricardo, Smith, and Marx, who thought that price reflected the labour embodied in an object; the neo-classicals argue (roughly speaking) that price ratios between goods simply reflect the relative relationship between supply and demand for those goods. Goods attract higher prices if they are more in demand or if they are scarcer than other goods. Thus the price mechanism should not be seen as in any way a marker of ultimate value; to infer that it is would be fallacious.

But this ‘Mere Figure-of-Speech’ repudiation both misconstrues the content of the earlier objections and overlooks the psychological instability of ‘as-if’ modes of regard. In the first place, the claim in the earlier sections is not that price involves *actual* commensuration of ultimate values or *actual* equivalences in terms of some set of ultimate values. To the contrary, the claim is that the universalisation of the price mechanism can lead us to regard goods as commensurable on the common metric of money or to regard them as equivalent with all other equally priced commodities. It need not be the case that the goods in question are in point of fact equivalent or commensurable in order for us to regard them as commensurable. It just needs to be what we might call a *natural error*. And in a world where so much emphasis is placed upon the financial it is quite natural for us to arrive at a conclusion modern economics tells us is erroneous, namely that prices are measures of ultimate value.

Moreover, there is a more general point to be made here about the psychological instability of as-if modes of

speech when used as forms of practical decision-making. The Mere Figure-of-Speech Objection relies heavily on agents recognising that we only ever speak ‘as-if’ prices were ultimate values. And that when we talk of the price value of a thing it is not an ultimate value. But this might well over-estimate our cognitive powers, for when we use such as-if claims as guides to action it is difficult for us to continue to treat them as mere conditionals. In action such conditionals will often become indicatives.

There is a second—and perhaps more significant—objection to this mere Figure-of-Speech approach. One of the reasons that many find Cost-Benefit Analysis disconcerting is that it is employed so extensively as the basis of public decision-making. Not only is it employed widely, but often it is the *only consideration* taken into account when making decisions that have tremendous consequences for the public at large. If we use the money-metric in this way, then we are implicitly saying that price captures our fundamental values, particularly if the financial costs and benefits are the only considerations taken into account. Indeed, if our public forms of practical reason are dominated by cash values, then it would seem that we have already lost any sense of the difference between price and ultimate value, whatever the Mere Figure-of-Speech objection might tell us. In many ways this simply reflects a more general peculiarity of modern economic theory according to which it is asserted that prices mean nothing with respect to ultimate value, while at the same time moves are made, as the foregoing illustrates, to extend the price mechanism into areas where one is effectively treating prices as ultimate values.

Concluding Remarks

In summary, there are three central reasons why one might be concerned about assigning a price to everything. Firstly, if one believes that value is plural and cannot be reduced to a single ‘supervalue’, then the use of price to measure everything should be worrying since it seems to be a step towards the provision of a single commensurating scale of value. Secondly, if one thinks that there are some goods that should be regarded as irreplaceable, then the system of universal equivalences provided by the money-metric should be of concern. Here we are faced with a genuine moral hazard, for we might well come to regard all goods as substitutable for one another at a certain price. Finally, if one denies that price represents the scale of ultimate value, then again the

extension of price to a wide range of spheres of social life is worrying since there is the danger that we might lose our sense of the distinction between the two. In all three instances, the moral issues raised are of legitimate concern, for a

One of the reasons that many find Cost-Benefit Analysis disconcerting is that it is employed so extensively as the basis of public decision-making.

world in which all goods are regarded as comparable and substitutable and in which the distinction between price and ultimate value is lost would be a spiritually impoverished one. It is therefore something we should do our utmost to avoid coming to pass.

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Forensic Science Ethics

by John Kleinig

John Kleinig looks at the role played by codes of ethics in forensic science, and canvasses some of the values which are central to ethical conduct in the field.

One might wonder how ethics could impinge on forensic science. After all, one's role as a forensic scientist is to examine materials using scientific procedures and to draw scientific inferences from them. And, of course, to the extent to which one thinks that that is all one is doing, ethics doesn't enter into forensic science.

But the process of examination and report does not occur in a vacuum. It is part of a larger process in which people are interacting with each other and in which their interests are involved and affected, and to the extent to which that is the case, ethical concerns are inevitably involved. What ethics does is mediate human relations, and what professional ethics does is to mediate those relations when one is acting in a particular social role.

Conducting an autopsy to determine the cause of death might seem like a straightforward scientific inquiry, but if it happens that the person whose body it was would have had some deep moral or religious objection to an autopsy, then the scientific investigation takes on a different character and is deeply implicated with ethical significance. And if the person who is conducting the autopsy is careless or incompetent then not only is poor or questionable science involved but people who might have had some entitlement to answers of a certain quality will have their expectations subverted. Not only so, but much of the evidence produced in a forensic laboratory may be critical to court decisions in which people's lives might be profoundly affected. Such possibilities place a significant burden on forensic scientists to do their work well and present it appropriately. Although any scientific work will be associated with certain ethical requirements, these requirements are even more evident in forensic science, just because the scientific work is expected to be incorporated into legal processes. Insofar as the outcomes of those processes almost inevitably affect people's interests, forensic science has a particularly close relationship with ethical values.



Generally, associations of forensic scientists recognize that the work done by their members has significance for human interests—whether it is forensic evidence produced at a trial or materials gathered at the site of some untoward event—and so many of those associations have developed codes of ethics to try to ensure that the so-called strictly scientific forensic work is done in a manner that respects the important interests of humans who will be affected by what is done. See the Californian Association's statement: 'It is the duty of any person practicing the profession of criminalistics to serve the interests of justice to the best of his ability at all times.'

Codes of Ethics

The earliest professional codes of ethics go back several thousands of years to Greece, India, and China, where they moderated relations between doctors and patients. Effectively, they were pledges on the part of doctors that they would observe certain norms or standards in treating patients. In promising to conduct themselves in certain ways, patients were given certain assurances when they placed themselves in the hands of someone who could greatly affect their interests. What was true then remains generally true of such codes, though it was not really until the late nineteenth century that codes of ethics became quite common. That was the result of several factors: an increasing division of labor or growing social specialization which gave some providers of services a sophisticated knowledge that was not generally accessible; and growing urbanization and the increasing depersonalization of society, so that people were required to expose their important interests to others whom they did not know. Instead of services being provided in the context

The process of forensic examination and report does not occur in a vacuum.

of tight-knit communities with a stable population, they came to be increasingly provided by anonymous suppliers in distant places. The late nineteenth century saw codes of ethics for engineers, architects, lawyers, and the manufacturers of various goods that touch on important interests like health and safety.

The point of such codes of ethics was to assure people that the services they wished to obtain could be assumed to conform to certain standards when provided by someone who had accepted the code (usually through membership of some professional association). Like a 'Good Housekeeping' seal, the code provided assurance to people who were unlikely to be in a position to make a knowledgeable assessment of a product's quality.

As we know, ethical codes can be somewhat fragile assurances. They are sometimes partisan or, if not partisan, they can easily fossilize; they are often top-down productions and find little ownership by those to whom they are meant to apply; they tend to be cast in broad terms, and are generally not sufficiently fine-grained to resolve the really difficult ethical quandaries in which those governed by them find themselves; moreover, they are often toothless, offering no sanctions against those who violate them.

Even so, codes of ethics do have the virtue of isolating ethical values or expectations that are particularly relevant to those occupying certain roles, values that are often at stake in the transactions in which people in those roles engage. Codes of ethics, then, tend to focus on ethical relations that are tested or strained when the services are rendered by their providers.

Forensic Codes of Ethics

The term 'forensic science' is sometimes used quite broadly to cover quite disparate activities, from forensic psychiatry to document examination. Some codes attempt to be fairly comprehensive, such as the Code of Conduct for the Californian Association of Criminalists. In some places, the different associations that have grown up around these different activities have developed their own codes of ethics. That can be seen in the case of the International Association for Identification, which has separate codes for forensic artists, forensic photographers, certified crime scene personnel, footwear examiners, bloodstain pattern examiners, and latent print examiners.

What are the ethical values that will be central to forensic science? I make no pretence to exhaustiveness. Indeed, I am selecting only a few core values that relate specifically to the generation and presentation of data.

Truthfulness

This involves not merely *honesty*, but *open-mindedness*, *clarity*, and *impartiality*. It is to be expected that when the

judgment of a forensic scientist is sought, the scientist will approach the investigation with an open mind, using replicable tests, will report results truthfully, in a manner not likely to mislead, and will not seek to represent them in ways that improperly favor one side in a case. Given that materials for examination may be inadequate or ambiguous in certain ways, due regard will need to be paid to such factors in the reporting of results. Results should be given only as much weight as they deserve.

We see a failure of truthfulness in the recent FBI case involving Brandon Mayfield, who was held in custody for 14 days after the FBI used a digital picture to compare fingerprints from a plastic bag full of detonators found after the Madrid train bombings. Even when they went to Madrid before they arrested Mr Mayfield, the FBI investigators did not bother to look at the original print. They were '100 percent certain' that they were identical, even though the Spanish police had serious doubts. They reported that the Spanish police 'felt satisfied' with their analysis. They were so sure they had a collaborator that they were prepared to discount anything that might have suggested their evidence was 'soft'.

The FBI case raises a further problem in this regard. Where a laboratory is funded by—indeed, is a part of—a police agency and might therefore be seen to have a 'natural bias' toward the prosecution in a criminal case, truthfulness will always be under pressure. In some other fields (say, the judiciary), the issue of 'conflict of interest'—if not actual then apparent—is likely to be raised where those conducting the evidentiary investigation seem to have ties to one side. Where such a conflict exists it does not of course follow that those who occupy a role *will* compromise it, even if the ties create a pressure to do so. However, avoiding a conflict of interest is about public confidence in a process as much as it is about the ability of people to operate honorably in the face of such pressures.

Conflicts of interest can also arise if a forensic scientist is asked to do work privately. Most codes recognize that such work should be remunerated, but base the remuneration on effort and not on results. Most codes specifically preclude contingency payments.

Where does this leave a forensic laboratory that is asked to produce a methamphetamine or heroin look-alike for use in drug busts? Or a laboratory that is asked to produce a fake report as an aid to interrogation?

Competence

Forensic scientific work demands certain relevant skills on the part of those who engage in it. It is important that those who profess such skills be appropriately trained,

Ethical codes can be somewhat fragile assurances.

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that they update their skills on a regular basis, and not misrepresent the level of skill that they possess or use their credentials to carry weight for opinions that go beyond their level of competence.

The issue of fingerprint identification has been a matter of recent controversy in the United States, especially following the *Daubert* decision (see <http://www.daubertontheweb.com/>). Consider, for example, the fact that different countries—and, in the US, different states—require different numbers of identical points for matching decisions, an issue that could have legal and hence ethical significance. Moreover, even if fingerprints constitute an important forensic tool, it does not follow that those who make fingerprint identifications are adequately trained in their analysis.

Diligence

Competence is not enough. Skills must be diligently and not sloppily or carelessly employed.

- Investigators need to be curious and persistent. One needs a certain passion if the potential for true and accurate results is to be maximized.
- Proper notes and records should be kept.
- Keeping equipment and samples free from contamination is not just good science—it is an *ethical* requirement of laboratory work.
- The most reliable tests should be used. Added to this may be a requirement of validation, requiring the assessment of a particular laboratory's ability to carry out such tests.

The ends of justice will not be served if forensic scientists fail to make the best use they can of the investigative opportunities with which they are provided. Consider a situation in which two tests are available, but in which the most accurate one is either more time consuming or more expensive than the less accurate one. How is one to

balance out the competing factors? (What is at stake? What will the Court accept? What resources are available?) May or ought a forensic scientist refuse to do certain work if adequate resources are not provided or if productivity concerns risk compromising results?

The ethical obligation of diligence might also cover situations in which forensic scientists become aware of the failings of their fellows—either to intervene or report.

Confidentiality

It is very likely that forensic scientists will be made privy to or will discover information about people that is not appropriately made public or shared with those who have no direct interest in an investigation. Information will need to be handled in such a way that the privacy rights of others are not jeopardized.

Security

Evidence must be secured so that others may not steal, taint, or improperly reveal it. And it must be preserved for as long as it may be needed.

Conclusion

All of these might seem like obvious demands and, of course, in a way they are. But in the press of daily life—where, for example, the work load at times becomes extremely heavy, or someone has made a silly mistake, or equipment has become old or obsolete and there are financial stringencies, or the case on which one is working is extremely high profile, or cross examination seems to be unreasonably antagonistic, compromises of various kinds might seem attractive and reasonable.

Avoiding a conflict of interest is about public confidence in a process as much as it is about the ability of people to operate honorably in the face of such pressures.



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Fighting ‘Dirty’: Torture in the Defence of Freedom?

**Panel discussion, organised by the ARC Special Research Centre
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The University of Melbourne Division**

Attendance is free and open to the public

Torture has been used throughout history, whether as a form of punishment, a way of extracting confession or gaining information, or as a method of terrorising entire populations. In our time it is universally morally condemned, almost universally prohibited by law—and yet still in use in interrogation, employed by security services whose activities and methods of operation tend to escape public scrutiny and control.

Torture has apparently been used as a method of obtaining information about the activities and plans of terrorist organisations in the worldwide ‘war on terror’, waged in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Whether free and democratic states should be using torture as a method of combating terrorism is a highly contentious moral, political, and legal issue. The panel will seek to contribute to the public debate by highlighting and clarifying important moral, legal, and psychological aspects of this issue.

The panelists:

Prof. C.A.J. (Tony) Coady (CAPPE, The University of Melbourne)

Mr Jo Szwarc (The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture)

Ms Jessica Wolfendale (Philosophy Department, Monash University)

Chair:

Assoc. Prof. Janna Thompson (CAPPE, The University of Melbourne)

Time and venue:

Wednesday, 25 August 2004

6.00 – 7.30 p.m.

Public Policy Lecture Theatre, 234 Queensberry Street, The University of Melbourne

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