

PHILOSOPHY COLLOQUIUM

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"A Plurality of Values"

Date, Monday, November 12, 2007

Paper: 3:30 P.M.; Memorial Building, Room 206

Refreshments: 5:30 P.M.; Ashe Building, Room 735

Alan Carter is Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow (which is the Chair once held by Thomas Reid, Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith). Prior to coming to Glasgow, he was Professor of Philosophy and Environmental Studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and prior to that he was Head of Department at Heythrop College, University of London. He is the author of three books and over 50 articles in academic journals.

Abstract

Most normative theories are monistic in their reliance upon the maximization of one core moral value. But such theories generate counter-intuitive implications. This is especially clear in the case of hedonistic utilitarianism. But an analysis of why we find those implications counter-intuitive implies that we ought to subscribe to a plurality of values. For example, the Repugnant Conclusion implies that we should value a high level of average happiness, while the Problem of the Ecstatic Psychopath implies that we should value either a large quantity of total happiness or a large number of worthwhile lives. The problems posed by pleasure-wizards, on the other hand, imply that we should include a non-utilitarian value: namely, equality. The article concludes by showing how such values can be kept in play simultaneously by means of multi-dimensional indifference planes and possibility frontiers, thereby demonstrating how a value-pluralist can provide determinate answers to moral questions.



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