

Ethical Agency Vis-à-vis Religious Citizenship: (In) Tangible Claim?

Abstract

Religious faith in numerous ways are related to citizenship: it is an approach into citizenship practice in that religious believers partake in organized faith communities and in the broader societies in which they exist and faith also offer guidance about what comprise a 'good' citizen. The post-Enlightenment conjecture that secular and sacred realms should and could be cut off, with political activity unrestrained by scriptural prescription, was possibly never practicable and surely is not now in those countries where religion plays a huge role in political and social life. This comprehension seems to insist a review of theories of citizenship and the previous national constitution of rights and obligations. Law and civic bodies will need to be re-constituted in line with multi-faith than secular values. This paper raise one side of a relatable contemporary debate - that religion is still an imperative influence in politics. Social science errs by envisaging this is an ephemeral phenomenon.

Keywords: Ethical Agency, Post-Enlightenment convention, Atomized Individualism, Ethical Gap, Spiritual Conventions.

Introduction

One of the significant re-findings in religious ethics over the previous two decades has been the close and intricate relation between ethical agency and moral communities. This relationship is really diverse. At times, as in Islam or Judaism, it also implies a close association with a sacred book. Again at times, as in Confucianism, it is very intimately related to the conventions of a specific society. Moreover there is a wide range of notions implied as the followers of Buddhist religion asserts about the compassion and illumination to Christian discussions regarding grace and liberty. However, in many religious conventions, an association is made between ethical agency and communities that contradicts few modern Western ethical theoretical assumptions. These theoretical assumptions tends to consider the moral agent as being distracted from communal relationship and centers on the liberty and rational independence as the essential feature of ethical agency.

Aim of the Study

How religious ethics helps to grasp the significance of religious relationship in imparting a sufficient account of ethical agency?

Main Text of the Study

Within the purview of secular post-Enlightenment convention, following Kant, ethical agency has typically been supposed as being free of religion and instead grounded itself on the independent rationality. The individual makes ethical choices and assessments centered exclusively on the rational criterion that are accessible to all capable, rational actors. Moral philosophers like Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) have opposed this understanding of ethical agency. To him, moral philosophy – the discipline that is related with independent, rational criterion in moral thinking- has been incapable to deliver unquestionable rational criterion or generally agreed ethical assessments. Contradistinctive differences remain as key ethical issues like aborting the child or justice among both the general civilians of Western societies and (particularly and most importantly) the experts of moral philosophy. MacIntyre has contended that virtues shaped by ethical and religious communities are crucial to a sufficient understanding of ethical agency. Charles Taylor (1989) too has contested a solely secular understanding of ethical agency. Though dedicated to an idea of autonomy within ethical agency, he however has contended that ethical reasoning cannot be accurately grasped without recognizing the long history of ethical concepts within particular and characteristically religious communities.



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A pluralistic society must identify that not only the religious minority groups should be valued if such form of society is to be truly inclusive, but also recognize that vital, yet apparently secular, ethical ideas have religious basis which may make complete sense only when these bases are clearly accredited.

The Debate about Agency

An essential part of MacIntyre's evaluation of moral philosophy is that it makes demand for secular logic that it is unable to convey. Modern ethics as a branch of knowledge has been inclined to claim that it only, not like theological ethics, can resolve moral problems in the public sphere. Moral logic without any spiritual exposure can be a common means of attaining moral conclusions. Whereas religion divides individuals, secular moral philosophy can connect them. Making decisions grounded on moral philosophy recommends the prospect of harmony across cultural and ideological boundaries. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre put such demands to a thorough evaluation. The book reveals a obvious gap between such demands and their accomplishment. In moral philosophy there are extremely clear and unsettled dissimilarities between, for instance, deontologists and utilitarians. These dissimilarities become evident as soon as latest debates are analyzed about problems such as the rightness of aborting the child or the features of justice in society. These dissimilarities are essentially divergent in terms of post-Enlightenment moral philosophy. MacIntyre contends that challenging rights of the fetus on one hand and of the woman on the other, are merely emphasized by the diverse sections without any expectation of logical resolution between them. Of course, specific power units within society can guarantee that, in the nonexistence of intellectual conformity, one of these sections exists. Though there is still a common belief that it is precise to have a conscience clause permitting healthcare experts disagree with aborting the child, not to take a direct role in providing such health provisions, the same experts are however still obliged to refer women appealing them to abort their child. At finest this is a conscience clause permitting experts to opt out of direct action on aborting the child but not to opt out of this provision altogether. A traditional Roman Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, or perhaps Buddhist health professional, opposed to abortion of the child on religious basis, has no legal option but to abide by.

Again, an essential flaw of much latest moral philosophy is "atomized individualism." It is entirely too often believed that moral conclusions are characteristically achieved by individuals through a series of rational steps without indicating to others or to conventions until they make an ethical choice. The focus at this point is upon the human self as a self-contained island and upon ethical choices achieved by an internalized procedure of rational deduction, as if individuals were not essentially the element of wider communities implanted in the past and tradition. Taylor (1989: 305ff.) seeks to illustrate at extent that this is a very impoverished understanding of the ethical self. Yet, paradoxically, it is however an understanding that

is implied within much debate of autonomy and decision making in applied secular morals.

In comparison to atomized individualism, various ethicists advocate revisiting the ethical convention of virtue ethics that point to the role of ethical communities in moulding virtuous individuals. Within this convention, individuals are qualified in virtues within local communities so that, when confront with moral problems, they do not come close to them as secluded individuals but as part of communities and as inheritor to traditional sources of ethical wisdom. Such individuals depend fewer upon secular reasonableness than upon deeply embedded virtuous habits to resolve ethical problems. On this understanding of bioethics – an understanding which is starting to receive more serious debate – the principal task of the discipline is to recognize virtues which should direct and mould healthcare experts and patients alike. Herein rest a vital problem. MacIntyre, for one, is extremely doubtful about whether Western society is still competent of having an integrated ethical vision. Having deconstructed the common demands of moral philosophy, he sees only disintegrated and changing ethical communities in the Western world. He indicates the requirement of a new ethical community, but shows little hope that it is really still potential for any ethical community to achieve common recognition. At most, presumably, a series of disintegrated communities can convey their virtues to sections such as modern medicine, but without any anticipation that everyone can acknowledge them.

All of this indicates a severe ethical gap that is specifically significant to religious ethics. There is an obvious gap between philosophical assertion regarding the virtue within communities and sociological uncertainty about genuine commune within the modern Western world. If modernity is situated upon individual wisdom, it founders upon unequal ethical tensions (the very tensions that moral philosophy was assumed to solve). A more postmodern outlook is hypothesized instead upon native communes molding virtuous individuals, but it founders upon the apparent impracticality of accomplishing common assent nowadays for revisiting to pre-modern communes. Moral disintegration and social tension seem to be unavoidable.

It is at this instant that Taylor recognizes a second major ethical gap. He believes that ethical agents are nowadays in an era in which a publicly available "cosmic order of meanings" is impracticality. All that moral agents can depend upon at present is "individual resonance" – which of course will differ from individual to individual. To relate this explanation to bioethics, it is painfully clear that in moral debate regarding healthcare today individuals cannot even consent upon an idea of health. For some individual, health is concerned with a nonexistence of disease (itself an expression with cultural alternatives), while for other individuals it is interested with wider well-being (an expression with meta-ethical alternatives) and for other individuals even with physical, psychological, and religious health (now with

metaphysical alternatives). Or in instance of modern warfare, it is often very hard, if not impracticable, to get contrasting sections to agree regarding how simply war theory really applies to them. For instance, one side may observe a specific option to weapons as being a genuine struggle for freedom, but the conflicting side may observe it instead as a terrorist act. In a detailed debate of Kantian ethics, John Hare (1996) explores a third major ethical gap. He contends that this kind of gap evolves from Kant's high ethical claim for individuals united with his conviction that everybody has a tendency not to follow this claim. Particularly, the high ethical claim that all individuals should always act ethically in ways that are universalizable is in obvious tension with their tendency to selfishness. Hare is skeptical by secular policies intended to decrease this ethical gap. The first seeks to decrease the ethical claim itself and the second exaggerates innate tendencies of the individual. Hare (and, he assumes, Kant) contends that this kind of gap can simply appropriately be resolved in terms of particularly religious ethics.

The impact of these ethical philosophers upon particularly religious ethics in the last two decades has been massive. Many religious ethicists contend that this philosophical move away from a personal understanding of ethical agency gives renewed momentum to their discipline, interested as it is providing a critical explanation of diverse ways that specific spiritual community react to ethical issues. Some individuals contend that Enlightenment secular ethical agency is itself only one ideological convention among others rather than an advantaged mode of ethical agency substituting conventional, religiously based ethical agency. It is at this instant that the idea of religious membership becomes important.

Assumptions about Moral Agency

A number of hypotheses rest behind this latest understanding of ethical agency among religious ethicists. Firstly, modernity is typified by worldwide pluralism rather than by secularity. Present form of secularism is a biased platform for investigating the world, but itself a type of ideology. Secondly, in this worldwide pluralism, contradicting and sometimes opposing religious communes abide and persist to contribute to ethical agency. Thirdly, such religious communes appropriately understood – and in spite of their internal dissimilarities – do still have an important character to play in the public realm, even in secular democracies.

A good demonstration of this is the degree to which religious ethicists, both in the United States and in the United Kingdom, and further widely within Europe, have recently been concerned in public debates of the ethics of military action following September 11, 2001 and the ethics of innovative scientific areas like that of stem cell research. It is currently an attributes of several nationwide committees instituted to think over such ethical issues that they frequently include and involve a religious ethicist, alongside secular philosophical thinkers and lawyers. Politicians in both the United States and the United Kingdom are very cautious of basing public strategy upon any particular religious instruction (even

in the Republic of Ireland such an attempt is no longer accepted). Similar can be said of several other, non-Western pluralistic societies, like India. In many Islamic communities, too, there are same tensions. In these situations, secular "principles" has increasingly had to browse religious diversity. There is at present a much wider appreciation than it was two decades ago that religious groups may have a distinguishing contribution to work for the well-being of the society at large.

The selection in England in July 2002 of the theologian Rowan Williams as archbishop of Canterbury is one instance of this rising identification. For the Church of England is yet an recognized church, the prime minister of the United Kingdom has a direct part in the appointing process of a new archbishop. This role remains in spite of the fact that spiritual crowds across Christian denominations and across faith groups as a whole in England are lower to that somewhere else in the United Kingdom and about half to those in the United States. The new archbishop, in order, can cast vote in the House of Lords and thus has a direct part in political process and is likely to be particularly powerful in ethical issues. Before his selection it was already recognized that Rowan Williams held comparatively traditional views on the morality of stem cell research of human embryos. He had open-minded outlook on homosexuality. All of these imply a very intricate model of interaction fairly at odds with a partition of public morals from spiritual traditions.

An additional twist to this instance is that as England increasingly perceives itself as a multi-belief society, so the archbishop of Canterbury has occasionally been recognized as a spokesperson for religious belief in general. In current years, a number of important gatherings have been arranged. The purpose of these gatherings has not been merely to encourage inter-religious companionship and collaboration, but also to present general cause when required to manipulate government strategy.

In recent times there have been numerous spiritually stirred empirical studies of civic ways of behaving and ethical behavior. One evident instance is "The Family, Religion and Culture Project" directed by the theologian and ethicist Don Browning. Books published as a consequence of the project have tried to give a general idea of the social and theological discussion regarding the family in modern America. At the core of this project is a confidence that the family should be protected strongly by Christians, in spite of the fact that in the honor of the Bible it has frequently been deformed in the past. The authors contend that the basic family issue of their time may be how to preserve and respect the intact family without twisting it into an object of admiration (see Browning 1997). Using widespread social statistics they contend that in America nowadays one out of every two marriages terminates in divorce and almost one in every three children is born outside marriage. However the United States is still a country of comparatively high spiritual attendance and more than two-thirds of all marriages take place in churches and synagogues. The author of this project are well conscious of these facts when

they try to defend the term “intact” family – by which they indicate families in which offspring are brought up by both of their genetic parents. Not desiring in any way to differentiate against other families, they nevertheless consider that it is crucial for spiritual communities to support intact families, if needed with aid from the law.

Theoreticians have set out at specific time span to evaluate in social scientific stipulations simply how important religious factors are in ethical agency (see Gill 1999). Using widespread international data from social attitude questionnaires, they examine whether claimed religious etiquette or faith has any demonstrable association to more general ethical ways of behaving or action. What appears is that the faithfully active are certainly unique in their ways of behaving and etiquette. Some of their ways of behaving do vary over time, particularly on topics such as sexuality, and there are clear ethical disagreements between different groupings of churchgoers in a number of regions. However, there are wide patterns of faith, teleology, and altruism that differentiate those who are faithfully active from those who are not. For instance, Christian churchgoers have, in addition to their unique theistic and Christocentric faiths, a strong sense of ethical order and concern for other individuals. They are more probably than others to be concerned with voluntary service: many child care groupings, youth associations, aid organization, and care-of-the-elderly assistances depend profoundly upon churchgoers. They observe overseas charitable giving as significant and are more cautious about euthanasia, capital punishment, etc and are more concerned regarding the family and civic directives than other individuals. None of these dissimilarities is absolute. Comparisons could be located in several other religions. The ideals, virtues, ethical ways of behaving, and manners of churchgoers are shared by several other individuals as well. The uniqueness of churchgoers is genuine but comparative. Even in pluralistic American society, there are still religious communes— Catholic Irish, Orthodox Greeks, and Orthodox Jews – which are comparatively less, disintegrated. In such communities the need to enter into public debate is in order to explore a general stock of notions and customs which all may get pleasure from and to which all may plea. Further, ethical philosophical theories, however they may seek to articulate some specific social and cultural point of view. As a result, contemporary, pluralistic societies cannot anticipate achieving ethical consensus (MacIntyre 1984: 268–9). While ethical agency within specific religious communes may be unique, it can still overlap with that of several other religious and “secular” communes.

Can a causal connection be established between spiritual belonging and the unique virtues that spiritual individual hold to a greater extent than other individual? The strongest proof for such a

connection involves contrasting the answers of two groupings of adult non-churchgoers – the one initially brought up for visiting the church more or less every week and the other individuals never visiting in childhood at all. The impacts of spontaneous churchgoing as a kid can yet be outlined in the relative power of the Christian faiths than grown-up non-churchgoers. Comparing non-churchgoers who never visited to church in their childhood with those adult non-churchgoers, who went regularly in their childhood, show twice the level of Christian belief. Additionally, the latter are more likely to embrace ethical ways of behaving on individual honesty and sexuality that are more intimate to those of regular churchgoers. (Gill 1999).

Conclusion

The secular post-Enlightenment ethics may have undervalued the authority of spiritual belonging or faith to stimulate individual ethical agents and overvalued its own authority to resolute public ethical dissimilarities. Contrastingly, in a civilization that is more self-aware pluralistic, spiritual conventions may once again be permitted an important role in public discussions regarding ethical issues, yet though they are not likely to be approved the kind of domination of moral decision-making more feature of theocracies than contemporary democracies.

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