



THE D'ARCY LECTURES 2021: COMMON GOOD: Theological, Philosophical, and Political Aspects

Lecture Six: Is the Church Paternalistic in Prescribing the Common Good?

'Paternalism is the interference of a state or an individual with another person, against their will, and defended or motivated by a claim that the person interfered with will be better off or protected.'

- *Gaudium et spes* §74: 'The political community exists, consequently, for the sake of the common good, in which it finds its full justification and significance, and the source of its inherent legitimacy.'
- Does solidarity as a firm commitment to the common good rule out an ontological account of the good (*what is really good for people*) and favour a practical account (*what people actually choose*)?

1. Clarify what is meant by Solidarity: introduce 3 distinctions

Correct two popular misconceptions: many people mistakenly believe that...

We impose a vision of their good on people when we speak of goods they have not chosen

You cannot be in solidarity with others without knowing and choosing to be such

Distinction 1: epistemic and ontological

People united by shared awareness (epistemic), or by common interests (ontological)

Task of conscientization: awakening awareness of what are real common interests.

Distinction 2: Those whose interests are at stake and stand to benefit: individuals or groups

E.g. patients awaiting a kidney transplant are individuals: some are satisfied without all

being satisfied; e.g. trade unionists campaigning for working conditions: all must be satisfied

Distinction 3: Descriptive; Evaluative; Prescriptive

Description: state the fact that the Government has a large majority in Parliament

Evaluative: consider it a good (or bad) thing that the majority should be so large

Prescription: encourage backbenchers to exercise responsibility to control majority's power

2. Metaphysics and Ethics: How might the real interests of people be known?

It is incoherent to claim that we can choose a conception of the good

There are limits rooted in human nature and in the nature of our environment to what can be said to be good for humans. From the many and varied options open to humans a person is free to choose her own pathway to fulfilment. Nussbaum on **Compassion and Respect**

3. Working for the Good of Others and Paternalism

It can be an act of solidarity to work for the good of others of which they themselves might not be aware. To do so is not necessarily to impose a conception of their good on people.

Health care; Education; Bases for trust, via institutional monitoring; accreditation

Contrast Business: feedback from consumer preferences; Politics: feedback from elections?

Conclusion: The argument affirmed (a) the validity of assertions of interests-based solidarity; (b) that an ontological account rooted in a view of human nature is compatible with human autonomy; (c) that assertions of solidarity in the name of common goods that are not as yet acknowledged by the people concerned can be valid; (d) that the role of political leaders is analogous to professional responsibility for the good of others; (e) that reliance on procedural correctness and electoral success is not sufficient to ensure the justifiability of policies; (f) that the two common good criteria are applicable, solidarity and subsidiarity.

Ronald Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 2011).

Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1985).

Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

David S. Oderberg, *Moral Theory. A Non-consequentialist Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).