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Commentary on Davies

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In Response to: Jackie Davies' *Analogy and narrative: caring about the foregone and the Repressed*

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Jackie Davies' paper "Analogy and narrative: caring about the foregone and repressed" is a sustained argument for the importance of argumentation in ethical debate and in particular for care in the use of analogy. All too often analogical arguments in ethics are she says driven by intuitive reactions to scenarios, which calls for analysis in terms of a narrative which illuminates a relational understanding of an ethical issue. Analogy by itself is not doing the hard philosophical legwork.

Her case is compelling. She sets the intuitions invoked by JJ Thomson's instance of the dying violinist, in which an otherwise independent person is asked to sacrifice their livelihood by acting as a life support system in the interests of another, admittedly important person, over against the intuitions to which Singer appeals when he discusses our duty to save a drowning child. Jackie Davies points out that the intuitions called up by these cases are contradictory, and that this fact shows that however compelling the analogies may seem to be, they are not sufficient to sustain the moral conclusions drawn in turn by Thomson and Singer. She says:

"Neither of these analogies is adequate to the argumentative task to which they are applied"(p.6).

Davies suggests that the argument in the case of the dying violinist is sustained by the fact that the example brings out aspects of the situation in which potential mothers support the lives of their fetus which applies the case in a non gender-specific way. Illuminating as this strategy may be in canceling the overwhelming patriarchal values which dominate discussion of abortion, Davies suggests the argument conceals the underlying structure of argumentation. She claims that there are often conflicting intuitions about cases such as the dying violinist, and that using the case as an knock down argument does not reveal the true structure of argumentation involved in our use of such examples.

Her critique moves to the role of relationality in moral argumentation. She suggests that it is necessary to untangle the importance of our own 'moral geography' in driving moral intuitions. When Singer and Thomson use moral thought experiments, claims Davies, they are not just using a form of argument by analogy, in which we, the listeners, are being invited to see new analogies – between being an unwilling bearer of a fetus and being an unwilling life support system for the dying violinist, for example. We are being asked to do more than that: to relocate our moral geography through a lesson couched in narrative mode. In fact, the structure of the moral thought experiment is to give an argument in support of a reading of relationships which then, in a familiar and rational fashion, can be used to drive the ethical viewpoint we chose to adopt.

Davies' argument is illustrated with a wealth of detailed cases. My concern is a doubt about the status of the claim about narrative argument. Is narrative argument a form of argument or not? At times Davies seems to suggest that the narrative argument which is important to the ethics of care is a form of argument, a way of putting a case. If that is so, narrative argument is not very different from an argument that uses a complex form of analogy, namely an analogy

which requires an imaginative relocation within a story. “Imagine how it would be if *you* had those relations,” the narrative goes. You do that by fleshing out lots of analogies, not oversimplifying but instead making those relations complex. Narrative on this view is just a particularly dense form of analogical argument, requiring a great deal of amplification to make the argumentation clear, but rational all the same.

At times, however, Davies appears to resist the notion that imaginative relocation into a net of relationships could be analogical. I shall try one version of an argument that might support such a claim. The attack on dualism of the later Wittgenstein can be read as arguing that one could not imagine another’s pain by *analogy*. If it were an analogy it would be necessary to argue from ‘I am in pain,’ and ‘I know what it would be like to be you in some respects’, to ‘I know what it would be like to be you in respect of pain’. If we take seriously Wittgenstein’s view in the *Philosophical Investigations* that any form of knowledge should be manifestable, then such an analogy could never be applied. I can manifest my own pain, and my understanding of what it would be like to be wearing your clothes, but I could never manifest feeling *your pain*. Analogy just can never get us to the right sort of understanding.

This reconstruction of the distinction between analogy and narrative has a clear consequence, that narratives might sway others but they could never unequivocally convince. Narratives, that is, are not arguments. Moreover moral intuitions must be relative to the narratives we accept. It is surprising that Davies wants to avoid full-blooded relativism. She says:

“A narrator cannot make up a story and have it mean whatever she wants it to mean... [that] will to a large degree depend upon how it resonates with the other narratives”(p.14).

Of course all relativists will require coherence. That is not yet to avoid relativism. The relativism to which Davies’ account commits her is nevertheless a strong form of relativism.

Let me take an example, intentionally both distant geographically from Canada and political, not personal, in flavor. A year ago, in Mexico, the right wing PAN party leader, Fox, won the presidency from the PRI, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (there’s an oxymoron!) that had run the country for the past 71 years. In March this year, hoping to defuse the armed conflict in the southern state of Chiapas, Fox allowed the Zapatistas, the pro-Indian revolutionary movement, to march through the country and hold a rally in the centre of the capital. The Zapatistas are led not by an Indian, but by the ski-masked Marcos, an intellectual from Mexico City who used the international media, especially the internet, to garner support. He insisted that the Zapatistas should be invited to address the Congress in the capital. After a long stand off, when the Zapatistas were lodged in a local university in the capital, they were allowed to address the Congress. This was already a complex issue, since under the constitution those who are not members of Congress are not allowed to address the chamber, excepting only the President, once a year. Constitutional propriety had been central to the acceptance of PAN, and now it was being undermined. Yet many politicians argued that in this case it was worth waiving the constitution to hear the voices of the repressed.

So far, this is just politics. In the event, the Zapatistas played a very careful hand. Rather than sending Marcos, a militant and non-indigenous person, to speak to the Congress, they sent a female of indigenous background, a political leader. Women have been very repressed in traditional indigenous societies, and this woman spoke in a personal voice, of her own struggle for recognition and identity.

The reaction was explosive. The members of Congress (although notably few PANistas) and the selected intellectuals who attended were greatly moved. The political voice was silenced by the personal voice. Here we have an instance of two conflicting ethical intuitions, two analogies that can be drawn, two narratives, each with a set of relationships which are invoked. The political constitutional story asks us to value political procedures. Propriety in political affairs is a value, we might be told, which must be conserved at all costs, and particularly in a country struggling for democratic forms. The implicit analogies would call on the failure of democracy consequent on giving up forms central to the constitution. The narrative locates the listeners as political beings. The alternative narrative of the personal experience of deprivation was not however precisely an argument against the legalistic voices of the constitutionalists. It draws analogies between the situation of an Indian woman and that we experience. It appeals to the ethics of care, to the narrative of identification. The constitution was outflanked, not argued against. The two narratives, the constitutional and the personal indigenous story, are incommensurable. What is right is relative to the narrative.

That relativism is in effect a relativism which stifles debate, and which is inimical to argumentation. But we do not have to accept that strong relativist formulation. When we are talking of political issues, we must hope that argumentation can be rescued. It is one thing to say that there are two narratives of my life, one as an academic frustrated by family, another as a fulfilled mother. Both of those can be true, and which I tell will certainly vary from day to day. But we cannot both have and not have a particular law for the indigenous – laws can't be tailored to the audience in quite the same way as my narrative. What we need to do is go on filling out the narrative of indigeneity in Mexico, amplifying the arguments and the counter arguments, looking for common ground. With suitable amplification the narrative of repression of indigenous voices could give a reason for overturning the constitution. The constitution might need to be revised to some better conception of justice, a further third narrative in which we balance out the intuitions drawn from the separate narratives we have told. Narratives, like analogies, serve in moral argument precisely because they appeal to underlying intuitions, to moral relations whose force might otherwise be overlooked. But analogies and narratives are never a sufficient stopping point. Amplification would treat each narrative as an (elliptical) instance of argumentation. We need well-motivated non *ad hoc* adducing of reasons, in a familiar style (e.g., van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992). A story is just the beginning of that process. Of course, amplification is precisely what the ethics of care narratives are designed to prompt, and what analogies remind us is necessary. We should not allow the process of reflecting on the rationality of those steps of amplification to be cut off in its prime, just as the narrative voice is spelt out in full analogical detail.

References

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