

Impartiality in Moral and Political Philosophy

Susan Mendus



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The debate between impartialists and their critics has dominated both moral and political philosophy for over a decade. Characteristically, impartialists argue that any sensible form of impartialism can accommodate the partial concerns we have for others. By contrast, partialists deny that this is so. They see the division as one which runs exceedingly deep and argue that, at the limit, impartialist thinking requires that we marginalise those concerns and commitments that make our lives meaningful. This book attempts to show both that the dispute between impartialists and their critics runs very deep, and that it can nonetheless be resolved. The resolution begins by asking how impartialist political philosophy can defend the priority of justice when it conflicts with people's commitments to their conceptions of the good. It is argued that priority can only defended if political impartialism has a moral foundation, and that moral foundation must not be a foundation in the ideal of equality (as is often thought), but a foundation in the partial concerns we have for others. In short, impartialist moral philosophy must take our partial concerns as central if it is to gain allegiance. However, if it does take our partial concerns as central, then it can generate a defence of political impartialism which shows why justice must take priority, but which also acknowledges that pluralism about the good is permanent.

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