

Murphy, Arthur Edward (1901–1962)

Arthur Murphy was born in Ithaca New York where his father was a professor of engineering at Cornell University. He graduated valedictorian from the University of California in 1923 with degrees in philosophy and political science, and received his Ph.D. in philosophy from the same University in 1925. He taught at the University of California, Cornell University, the University of Chicago, Brown University, the University of Washington, and the University of Texas. In 1950 he served as the President of Eastern division of the American Philosophical Association, and he gave the Carus Lectures in 1955.

Murphy has a nuanced and intricately developed moral philosophy that does not fit well with the usual classifications of moral theory. While he rejected what he took to be the scientific side of DEWEY (1859–1952), he was deeply influenced by Dewey as well as by WITTGENSTEIN (1889–1951), though his account of morality is more systematic than that of avowed Wittgensteinians writing about morality (e.g., Beehler, Diamond, and Winch).

Murphy's major work, *The Theory of Practical Reason* (1964), was drawn from his Carus Lectures and was published posthumously. In it, Murphy argues against metaethical theories both cognitivist and noncognitivist and even rejects the very underlying idea of such a linguistic approach as a proper way of doing moral philosophy (pp. 28–48). He also argues against the traditional moral theories of 'First Principles', provides a reasoned basis for rejection of their very underlying assumptions and conceptions of justification, and develops a fundamentally different positive alternative to them. He reserves his most forceful and detailed criticism for the theories of KANT (1724–1804) and SIDGWICK (1838–1900), claiming their theories, for all their systematicity, care, and integrity, shed little light on morality and have a fundamentally mistaken conception of what moral philosophy can and should be (285–317; 318–54). It is a conception which leads us away from a contextualist and specific-life-problems oriented way of thinking about morality, which, if carefully done and without turning itself into some conception of APPLIED ETHICS, will yield an understanding (something more than a knowing how) of what the moral language-game is and of the social practices in which it is embedded. Murphy

delineates the importance that these practices have for us and how and why we reason morally, and he describes the nature of justification in ethics.

His conception of PRACTICAL REASONING systematically sets out the structures and categories relied on in his conception of how to proceed in moral philosophy, working on the underlying assumption of such a contextualism and form of life orientation. In understanding what practical reasoning is, we need first to recognize that it is beings with wants who have moral REASONS FOR ACTION. Without such wanting beings, whose "reasons are never merely the articulation of their wants" (277), there would be no moral reasons or practical reasons. Still, "the most stringent moral requirements are requirements for the right achievement of good, and in this good the satisfaction of man's nature as a wanting being is a basic and essential factor. There is much more than this to the normative cogency of good, but unless there is at least this there is no human good worth having" (277). Wants, as such, are not moral claims. It is false, Murphy contends, that in the end our reasons are just the articulation of what we want (277–88). "Wants do not judge anything or claim a right to satisfaction; it is only men as practical agents who do that. And for such a *de facto* want, while it may supply the first word in an argument about claims and values, it can never be the last. The whole picture of wants making claims which ought to have a right to be acknowledged as valid (by other wants?) is mythological, and no less fabulous for being drawn in terms that have a scientific look about them" (278). To speak of wants judging anything is what Gilbert Ryle would have called a category mistake.

There is a categorial distinction between wants and reasons. Sometimes a person can get what she wants only by frustrating the wants of others. What should be done in such a situation? This is a question "wants do not ask, and cannot answer." Indeed it makes no sense to talk in this way. But as active agents we sometimes ask such questions not merely as wanting (self-interested or otherwise) beings, but as moral persons who set out to do not merely what we want (or sometimes even at all what we want), but what we ought. When we so reason, we are attempting to understand another person's wants or our own "not just as an occurrence influencing behaviour, but as a ground for claims upon right action" (281). But this is to see these wants in a dif-

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ferent way from just noting them as *motivating forces* that affect behaviour. I ask “Should my want have priority over his?” In normal circumstances, I know that my want has more urgency for me, as likewise his does for him. But in reasoning morally we seek to judge fairly the merits of claims made on behalf of wants. And there I must discount this subjective bias—the *urgency* of my wanting—and try to weigh the issue on a scale in which “no weight is given to my wanting as a reason for right doing that would not, in like circumstances, be registered for his. That is what it is to be objective in such judgments” (280). When I do such discounting, I treat my wants and his wants as *justificatory* reasons and not just as *motivating* or *explanatory* reasons. I treat these wants not just as *causal pushes* but as *grounds* for justifiable action. As such these wants must have equal *prima facie* cogency in all cases to which they have relevant application. The ‘must’ here is constitutive of the practices in which justification makes moral sense. It need not be a causal or a logical ‘must’. To offer a consideration as a justifying reason when it supports my cause and, in relevantly like circumstances, to refuse to recognise it when it supports yours, is “just what it means to be arbitrary and unreasonable in the presentation of a moral claim” (280). For the purposes of justification, our reasons must be common grounds if they are to be grounds at all. To reason within this constraint is an essential part of what it is to be a moral person.

In setting out the conditions of practical reasoning, which includes moral reasoning, Murphy attends to the uses of language which he sees as rooted in the NEEDS and INTERESTS which these various uses serve. Practical reasoning uses the language of justification and is centrally concerned with justifying reasons: with grounds for action. This reasoning, as we have seen, starts with wants; it makes no sense unless we presuppose wanting, needful agents who are seeking a common ground for their actions. Murphy is concerned not only with the meanings of words or the logical status of utterances *per se*, but also with the practices and forms of life that go with them, and in particular with the moral practices in which our moral talk is embedded. He wants clearly to characterise these uses, which are rooted in our social practices, as they function in their distinctive settings, for there is no understanding the one without the other. He is also concerned with the purpose of moral language and moral practices, the presup-

positions of certain kinds of utterances, and the background culture involved in them. (See Kolenda, 1968, 151.) This embeddedness of practical discourse notwithstanding, the very possibility of practical discourse presupposes wanting agents (could there be any other kind?) capable of reflective endorsement and of caring not only for themselves but for others as well, all of whom have wants which become reasons when they are universalised and rooted in a community of which these persons are a part.

Murphy points to two positive conditions which the users of the language of justification must, on pain of incoherence, observe. There are two distinct bases on which the utterance “X should be done” rests: one factual and the other normative. The speaker refers to some fact that X accomplishes (such as meeting a need, achieving a goal, satisfying a want), which we shall call *F*. But in addition to *F* there is the normative component *N*, namely that X is *worth* accomplishing. All moral and other practical utterances must have both an *F* and an *N*. Moreover, not only must *F* connect with some facts in the world, natural or social, but the facts mentioned must also be of some interest (direct or indirect) to the utterer of the utterance and to his hearers, actual or potential, who may be in situations relevant to it.

Moral language is rooted in certain facts of human existence which find expression in attitudes of concern. Murphy incorporates certain facets of ethical NATURALISM, in the one instance, and of EMOTIVISM, in the other. The two components of *F* (the fact-stating component and the attitude-expressing component) both point to the factual, empirical rootedness of moral language. That language has its home in the natural and social world and would lose its point if it were not closely related to facts about which human beings are or at least can be practically concerned. (See Kolenda, 1968, 152.) Concern reflects that attitudes are involved; the facts, and the implications of acting in the light of those facts, are what the attitudes are directed toward.

In considering *N*, the normative component of moral discourse, we return to our question: “Under what circumstances does a fact, a want, a pro-attitude become a justifying reason?” Only when we are prepared to say of some of the many (sometimes conflicting) wants that they are *entitled* to recognition and *should* be allowed satisfaction. Only when this obtains have we come to engage in normative

deliberation. Our moral utterances must make a claim which is universalizable and thus enable us to draw a distinction between *what is valued* and *what has value*.

The normative component *N* (what is *worth* endorsing) has three requirements: *N1* (universality), *N2* (community), and *N3* (moral selfhood). With respect to universality, Murphy remarks, “Reasons are public essentially; they must be common grounds for action if they are warrantably to be grounds at all, and it is in the establishment of such a community of understanding that they prove their cogency as reasons” (114). All reasons are in this sense universal, such that “if they are valid grounds for one man’s actions they must be no less so for any other man’s whose situation is, in all morally relevant circumstances, the same” (114–15). I can, of course, have my reasons for being for or against an action, and you can have yours; they need not be the same reasons, and they can conflict or perhaps be incommensurable; but they cannot be either my private reasons which could not possibly be yours or your private reasons which could not possibly be mine. That notion is incoherent.

N2, the community requirement, presupposes the universality condition, *N1*, but it has a content and import of its own. *N2* obtains when certain reasons for action are not only acknowledged theoretically, but are also regarded as practically binding for a given community. Where *N2* obtains, there exists a background of social practices on which there is general agreement in the community. Moreover, “only within a community can appeal to reasons be effectively made.” (See Kolenda, 1968, 154.) But “this community” must be a moral community—a group of persons who recognise that, though they are free to satisfy certain interests, they are also obliged to acknowledge similar pursuits on the part of others. They must also cooperate in creating and sustaining those social practices that make that cooperation feasible and indeed facilitate it. It is by reference to some such COMMON GOOD of such a group that at least some conflicts and disagreements are resolved. Where no such basic agreement as to the common good exists, Murphy argues, the normative use of language is not possible.

Murphy follows Wittgenstein in arguing that the kind of agreement involved here is not an agreement in opinions but in forms of life, “in the whole body of acceptances and forbearances that constitute a so-

cial group as a community” (243). Only to the extent that we have such background agreement can we have legitimate arguments in morality. Two things are crucial to note here: (1) “A ‘community’ is not just any group that influences the behaviour of its members. It is a group whose members are related in a distinctive way, the way of moral understanding, and the group is a community only insofar as they are thus related” (215). (2) Facing the objection that he is simply taking agreement as the final good and “rational inquiry as just a means to the achievement of this end, no matter how or on what terms, if only everybody will agree to them,” Murphy responds, in what at least sounds like a *decisionist* manner: “Of course not. In any actual society, and it is in such only that we are called on to make moral judgments, there are moral limits to any rationally acceptable agreement. When these limits have been reached, we must simply take a stand, however potent be the powers that disagree, and defend the right as we see it” (243). Here he is closer to HARE, Nowell-Smith, CAMUS (1913–1960), and SARTRE (1905–1980) than he seems to realise.

N3, moral selfhood, is closely linked to *N2* and, like *N2*, presupposes *N1*. The creation of moral communities calls for the initiative of moral agents, though these moral agents always live, respond, think, and write in the thick accumulated texture of social moral practices. To be moral agents, it is inescapable, indeed, necessary, that we reason and act in the ways described above. To so reason and act “is a requirement for the achievement of that ‘realm of ends’ or community of understanding in which a common good and right have a practical cogency for action” (282). To so act and reason is to show that one has moral selfhood and are necessary conditions for moral discourse to function. Moral relations are essentially and inescapably relations between persons in communities. “There are no communities save as actual men in social groups are so related as to share in rights and goods that *in common* they can recognise as their own. It is as persons or moral agents that they can be thus related” (378). The agency of a moral self emerges, sustains itself, and develops in coming to recognise the validity of some practical reasons. We are thereby identified as moral persons having moral selfhood. “A person is what he stands for and stands by as an agent.” (Kolenda 1968, 154; and Kolenda 1969, 4–19.)

Murphy wants to understand and to clearly depict

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what it is to be reasonable in our common life and what this commits us to (364). Our lives are replete with moral problems. What a “sound moral philosophy can do” is to give us a better grip on these problems, a better sense of what is relevant to their solution, and an understanding of what in various problematic situations “a right or justifiable solution would be, if we could get it” (364). The work of moral inquiry is “to find grounds for a working understanding on which all concerned may go on together to the solution of their common problems” (369). This, Murphy argues, requires a sensitivity to the subtleties of moral language, including an understanding of the point of these subtleties; a reasonably good knowledge (where it can be had) of the relevant facts of the problem in question; an understanding and an empathetic appreciation of the different implications of policies taken in the light of those facts; an open-mindedness and a tolerance of all those who are themselves tolerant—and *sometimes* even a tolerance of those who are not; a “clear-headed firmness in holding to essentials that must not be compromised and a good sense in surrendering what comparatively does not matter”; and an attitude of IMPARTIALITY and FAIRNESS to all those involved in a moral issue. To have such an attitude and to be able to consistently act in accordance with it is what it is to be reasonable. And this is a concrete reasonableness: it “is what it is to be reasonable in judgement on the specific merits of an issue of conflicting rights and values” (359). It is, Murphy continues, “what it would be like to follow reason in its practical use” (369).

See also: ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS; COMMON GOOD; COMMUNITARIANISM; DEWEY; EMOTIVISM; FAIRNESS; IMPARTIALITY; INTERESTS; KANTIAN ETHICS; MORAL POINT OF VIEW; MORAL REASONING; NATURALISM; NEEDS; PRACTICAL REASON[ING]; REASONS FOR ACTION; SIDGWICK; SYMPATHY; TOLERATION; WITTGENSTEINIAN ETHICS.

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Kai E. Nielsen

mysticism

While ‘mysticism’ typically involves some experience in which the mystic attains a particular insight or understanding (whether through contemplation, prayer, or immediate illumination), there is no acceptable comprehensive characterization of mysticism as such. This article will deal broadly with generally recognized varieties of mysticism and the ethical issues which emerge in their elaboration and criticism. The relations between ethics and mysticism vary across time, place, and tradition. While this entry deals primarily with the relations between