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Commentary on “Ethical Argumentation, Objectivity, and Bias”

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1. Summary

Allen’s central question: In ethics, must partiality be unfair? His answer, in sympathy with Shafer-Landau, Parfit, and Singer: no. And the beginnings of a theory: ethics contains a defeasible presumption of impartiality.

2. Comments

What is the relation between Allen’s answer and those of Shafer-Landau, Parfit, and Singer? Allen shows that *according to these thinkers*, partiality need not be unfair. Does he mean to move from there to the claim that partiality really need not be unfair, and if so how?

Further, on Parfit’s theory, the values underpinning object-given value-based reasons are mind-independent. But, Allen suggests, when we decide how to act on such reasons, our evaluation will express our mental states and will thus be *subject-given*.

Allen’s claim, though true, seems trivial. Consider any mind-independent fact p . The belief that p will be trivially mind-dependent. In general, the interesting question about some fact p is about the mind-dependence or independence of p itself, not of some mental state taking p as its content. So what philosophical conclusion does Allen mean to draw from this point?

Allen also suggests that ethics contains a defeasible presumption of impartiality. But why think that it contains even this? It is, after all, apparently an *ethical* failing not to show preference to one’s family and friends. Maybe ethics instead just brackets one important set of partial considerations.