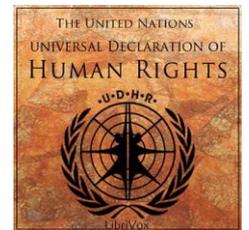# DEMOCRACY AND DERADICALISATION PROGRAMMES

Should a government be allowed to intervene in pre- or non-violent radicalisation?

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DEMOCRACY AND DERADICALISATION PROGRAMMES

INTRODUCTION

Human rights safeguard that individuals can develop their ideas and identity undisturbed by government or governmental agencies. With regard to radicalisation, adopting radical ideas is not a crime. Some crimes, such as hate-speech and ideological violence, are associated with radicalisation, but when individuals or groups only develop ideas without committing crimes there is no legal ground or justification for intervening.

From an ethical point of view there might be justifications to set up programmes for individuals who have or could develop radical ideas, but a justification cannot be based solely on security concerns or possible consequences of a terrorist attack.

Radical ideas as such do not pose a direct threat to a democratic society, and our constitutions and human rights conventions explicitly allow citizens to develop their ideals undisturbed by government intervention. In this paper we explore possible justifications for programmes that focus on radicals who have not committed crimes.

Requests for help

When people ask for help it is reasonably unproblematic – ethically speaking – to justify carrying out prevention programmes or interventions.

For example in Norway, Sweden and Germany there are non-governmental organisations and local governments that help individuals who want to leave the extreme right wing environment or criminal gangs.[1] These individuals decide for themselves that they want or

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[1] See http://www.exit-deutschland.de/. The programme in Norway was from 1997 to 2000 financed by government and is now run by Voksne for Barn an NGO.

need support and ask for it. Insofar as the organisation providing this support informs individuals correctly and sufficiently about the aims of their programmes and what support the individuals can expect, these programmes do not need a specific justification.

However, justifying programmes for individuals who do not ask for help is more complex. Especially when someone only has radical thoughts but is not (yet) violent. An individual's loss of autonomy might be considered reason enough within duty-based ethical theories to intervene, but only to help restore the individual's autonomy. This would allow for interventions if someone has become a member of a sector is under the spell of a charismatic leader.

Preventive Policing

Sorell has argued that preventive policing is justifiable in counterterrorism. In his view, in a Kantian liberal framework the preparation of terrorist attacks can be detected and prevented, but people's rights to express and form their opinions may not be restricted. From a liberal point of view terrorism is not only unacceptable because people are killed but because in a terrorist attack the whole aim is to randomly scare and kill as many people as possible. These goals make terrorism distinctly wrong. Furthermore, terrorism 'repudiates any ideal of non-violence, and any political order sustained by impartial oversight or the rule of law' (Sorell, 2009 p21).

Although terrorist attacks can and should be prevented according to liberal theories, thoughts and even expressions and discussions about terrorist attacks should not be restricted in liberal democracies: talking about attacks, whether positively or negatively, should be part of the freedom of expression and not be restricted (Sorell, 2009).

Thinking about and discussing attacks does not need to lead to attacks being carried out; even if a person were to consider an attack justified one cannot conclude that he or she is necessarily preparing one.

So according to Sorell preventative measures against terrorism can be taken in a liberal democracy but only if there is evidence (not mere suspicion) that someone is preparing an attack (Sorell, 2009). Measures are even justified if they lead to a (temporary) invasion of privacy or a (temporary) violation of human rights of some citizens. Prevention of terrorist attacks using surveillance technologies or special investigation techniques can also be justified under certain circumstances.
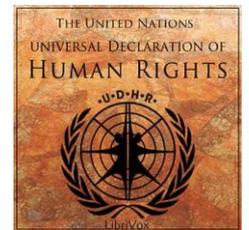
Sorell concludes that it is more justifiable to focus surveillance on vulnerable places and materials that can be used in an attack, than on individuals, because with individuals there is always a risk of discrimination.

The argumentation that Sorell has developed does not allow for prevention of radicalisation, but only for prevention of attacks. Does this mean that there is no justification for any programme focussing on the prevention or curbing of radicalisation of a person or a group? We examined literature in ethics and political philosophy to find ideas about if and when intervening in the process of pre-violent radicalisation could be justifiable.

Virtue Ethics

From a virtue ethics point of view one could argue that especially children and adolescents need guidance in forming their own lives. People do not form ideas and identities in complete isolation as unencumbered selves. Forming your identity happens in interaction with others. Children and adolescents are educated in schools and at home where some of the interaction is even imposed on them.

According to Savater, a philosopher who has written extensively on education, a certain force and compulsion is necessary to educate children and adolescents in order for them to become free, autonomous citizens. They need to acquire the knowledge and skills related to critical thinking to develop their own freedom and autonomy (Savater, 2001). This means that especially children and adolescents should be supported in forming their own ideas.

Another influential virtue ethicist, MacIntyre ,talks about the quest for a good life for both individuals and society (MacIntyre, 1981). The fact that virtue ethics refers to an objective 'good life' makes many people wary of it; in a diverse and pluriform society it seems impossible to define an objective and universal good life. A diverse society, however, is not inconsistent with virtue ethics because virtue ethics is about what humans need to do to achieve a good life, and sees discussions about the good life as essential in societies.

The good life is not a fixed ideal according to many contemporary virtue ethicists. Specifically, we achieve the good life by developing those capacities that make us uniquely human (our virtues): we reason, critically reflect and discuss ideas with other humans.

These capacities help *individuals* in their quest for achieving a good life and help *societies* in their search for a just society. Although every human being has these capacities, they need to be developed and this can only be done by practicing. If your own radical ideas make it impossible for you to rationally and critically

reflect on these ideas, then according to virtue ethics, this life cannot be the good life for you because you do not develop and realise your capacity as a human being (Sandel, 2010).

This justification for programmes that prevent radicalisation, or are aimed to stop a radicalisation process, poses constraints on the types of programmes that should be developed and the way participants are selected. Because the quest for a good life is a struggle for all human beings, it might be stigmatizing to point to a specific group that needs guidance or support. It needs to be carefully considered whether specific groups are targeted and, in principle, programmes should be open for every adolescent.

Virtue ethics regards the moral development of every person as a lifelong development, but with the first crucial steps during youth. In this process, the development of programmes that teach kids and adolescents to critically reflect on their own and others' opinions with regard to the good life and a just society, are essential. Within educational programmes these competences are addressed and in some countries even in separate courses on citizenship, for example England, France, and Finland. Adolescents who no longer attend school could still use guidance and support in their quest for a good life and a just society.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum: simply referring to the risk of violence and terrorism is not enough to justify intervening in non-violent or pre-violent radicalisation. However, virtue ethics gives a clear moral justification for programmes to prevent or stop radicalisation, provided that the programmes focus on developing participants' capabilities to define and live their own good life.

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