

# Introduction to Community

The following essays were presented at the second annual Ethics Across the Disciplines Conference held at Viterbo University in April 2002. The theme of the conference was «Community: Living with Difference in Art, Religion and Politics.» It was the second in a series of conferences intended to bring scholars into dialogue about concepts that are deeply rooted in historical practices and narratives and yet have relevance to our contemporary understanding of teaching ethics.

In recent years philosophical discussions about community have focused chiefly on the communitarianism vs. liberalism debate. But there ways of talking about community that, while having connections to political theory, don't necessarily presuppose one version or the other. Often when people talk about community in the everyday sense, say of an «artistic community,» or «religious community,» they are referring to a group of people who are joined together by what they share in common. This is the notion of community Augustine had in mind when he defined a «people» as «a fellowship of a multitude of rational beings united through sharing in an agreement about what it loves.» For people in such communities (and, if we are fortunate, and neither beasts nor gods, we are all in a number of such communities overlapping with one another) crucial questions come up on a regular basis about the conditions of our membership. The very things that draw us together - the activities, practices, beliefs, ideas, histories - that unite us also form the basis for drawing us apart. If we attempt to describe the types of issues along which the fault lines of community form, they tend to be issues of art, politics, and religion.

The essays in this volume are attempts to look more closely at how people are drawn together and pulled apart, into and out of community with one another, on a regular basis over fundamental issues. What the authors have in common is a shared commitment to the idea that we will be better teachers if we have a better understanding of the conditions of living together in the face of our differences.

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