2001

Feminists Doing Ethics

Peggy DesAutels
University of Dayton, pdesautels1@udayton.edu

Joanne Waugh
University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: http://ecommons.udayton.edu/phl_fac_pub
Part of the History of Philosophy Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

eCommons Citation
http://ecommons.udayton.edu/phl_fac_pub/71

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Philosophy at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact f rice1@udayton.edu, m sclangen1@udayton.edu.
Introduction

Peggy DesAutels and Joanne Waugh

We offer this volume as a contribution to the ongoing conversation that goes under the name of “feminist ethics.” This conversation took an exciting and interesting turn recently at the Feminist Ethics Revisited Conference; many of the essays in this volume articulate ideas and analyses first presented there.¹ The term feminist ethics was used broadly at this conference—as it is again here—to refer to the perspectives on women’s experience that come into view at the intersections of ethics, politics, philosophy, and literature. Earlier generations of philosophers—both male and female—have found that the experiences of women fit neither easily nor neatly into the categories favored by traditional, mainstream philosophy. That the dominant discourse of philosophy still strains to accommodate women’s experiences has prompted feminist philosophers to go beyond the usual boundaries, especially in ethics. In her contribution to this volume, “Seeing Power in Morality: A Proposal for Feminist Naturalism in Ethics,” Margaret Urban Walker succinctly summarizes feminists’ achievements in ethics. “Feminist ethics,” Walker writes, “is inevitably, and fundamentally, a discourse about morality and power” (4). Our volume emphasizes this essential insight of feminist ethics.

Philosophical ethics typically neglects power, taking its subject to be the ideal or transcendent nature of morality—something finer and higher than mere power. When attention is paid to questions of power, it is typically seen as standing in opposition to morality. Walker decries this neglect and denies this opposition at the same time that she insists that the concept of morality should be neither reduced to power nor eliminated in its favor. Walker insists on the importance of morality for challenging the legitimacy of distributions of power, for those who are powerless have neither grounds nor means for
challenging existing power relations without appealing to morality. Indeed, this is one reason why feminist moral discourse asks whether and how power is distributed equally and unequally, whether and how it gains legitimacy or sustains itself illegitimately, and whether and when people having power over others is, in Walker’s words, “morally necessary, arbitrary, or catastrophic” (5). To answer such questions Walker suggests that we recognize that morality “is a disposition of powers through an arrangement of responsibilities,” that these responsibilities and powers are both social and distinctively moral, and that they are no less “natural” for being either or both (6). Indeed, such powers and responsibilities are “natural” because they are necessary in order for human societies to function, and human life naturally perpetuates itself through human societies.

Moral concepts can be abstracted from social practices only at the risk of missing the part of their meaning—typically the largest part—that is embedded in the social practices that generate the concepts. This is not to deny the moral authority of morality; rather, it is to insist that there is a specifically moral understanding of social practices, an understanding that we might, following Walker, call the moral structure of these practices. Walker sees this moral structure in practices of responsibility; and with the understanding of responsibility comes the understanding of agency and the values, positive and negative, that attach to those agents to whom we differentially ascribe responsibility. It is our understanding of these practices and the concepts embedded in them that grounds the trust that is recognized in the very notion of the moral authority of morality. Of course, these practices may be sustained by power and authority that is not moral, a fact that is often more transparent to those who have a lesser share of power and responsibility and are accordingly valued—or devalued—by those with a greater share.

Walker provides an example of how a concept like the social contract—as a contract between equals—when analyzed in terms of the social practices that make sense of it, defines itself in terms of the powers that white male equals have over those who are neither male nor white and thus are not equals.2 As Walker puts it, “Equals do not just have different and greater powers and entitlements relative to those below: they are defined as equal by their shared entitlements to and powers over those below” (12). Indeed, the logic of equality that allegedly structures the Enlightenment project of moral universalism may also be what renders the project impossible. There is still another problem with this project of building an ethics and politics on consensual equality, for as feminist philosophers have insisted, within the scope of our moral concern we find those who are not equal because of their immaturity, disability, incapacity, vulnerability, and dependence. Such inequality, as Walker notes, describes or will describe all of us at some point in our lives—whatever our rational agency at this time. Questions about our responsibilities to those with whom we have unequal power relationships
thus move us to undertake political analyses that invoke concepts other than a social contract between and among equals, analyses in which questions must be asked about the exercise of power, the same questions that those working in feminist ethics ask.

These political analyses also provide us with occasions on which to develop the solidarity necessary for feminist politics and ethics, as Uma Narayan suggests in “The Scope of Our Concerns: Reflections on ‘Woman’ as the Subject of Feminist Politics.” Such occasions for developing solidarity are crucial in Narayan’s analysis because she finds the suggestion that feminist politics groups together all experiences of those who identify themselves as women to be a nonstarter. Indeed, Narayan takes this to be the question that currently faces feminist ethics: “Can the scope of feminist analyses, and the agenda of feminist moral and political engagement, be justifiably restricted to ‘issues pertaining to the interests of women’?” (15). That feminist politics should take its project as fighting for the interests of all women had been the conclusion of radical feminists, who took “women” as the name of a group whose members had been systematically oppressed because they were women. But the analyses presented by radical feminists were themselves contested by poor women, women of color, and women of differing sexual orientation(s) as not taking their experiences into account. One response to these objections, which Narayan labels the “Differences Critique,” is to include the interests of these neglected groups, expanding the view of women’s interests to form what Narayan calls the “Jigsaw Puzzle Picture Model of Women’s Interests.” But if all of women’s interests do not fit together as this model suggests, then feminist politics (and feminist ethics) may not entail advancing the interests of all women. What should drive feminist politics and feminist ethics, Narayan suggests, is solidarity based on shared political analyses and not necessarily the experience of being oppressed by patriarchy. Solidarity based on shared politics can lead to privileged women—and men—working against their own privileged interests and with and for women whose oppression results from some combination of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. Gender is not merely added to these other factors; the relevant metaphor for this combination is chemical, not mechanical. Because one cannot cut off the effects of gender from those of race, class, and sexuality, Narayan suggests that the “Oppressed Identity-Based Cutoff Model” of political membership may deprive feminists of theoretical insights and practical strategies for dealing with oppression.

Questions about how analyses of inequality and oppression affect conceptions of agency have received a good deal of attention from feminist philosophers, and there has been some concern that the very notion of agency as it has been formulated in traditional ethics is fatally compromised insofar as it assumes, first, that moral agents are equal in power(s) and, second, that autonomy should be identified with those who are depended on
rather than dependent. Not only is this notion of the equality of moral agents defined, as Walker observes, in terms of their sharing entitlements to and powers over unequals, the concepts of dependence and independence invoked in such a notion themselves depend on distinguishing—artificially—between the public and the private spheres and on identifying morality with public behavior. Feminist ethics is left with a host of problems to address, not the least of them being whether and how moral damage is done to oppressed people by diminishing their conception of themselves as moral agents. Especially pressing are questions of how the concept of moral agency may be admitted into feminist ethics: What formulation(s) and what metaphors are and should be used to introduce the concept? And how will certain formulations and metaphors affect the moral structure(s) of the social practices of which they are a part?

Diana Tietjens Meyers takes up the question of how social categories of gender affect women's conceptions of themselves in “Social Groups and Individual Identities—Individuality, Agency, and Theory.” Meyers argues for a conception of identity that recognizes the power that social constructs of gender exercise in individual identity, despite individual choice. The conflict that may ensue between a socially mandated conception of identity, in which one is a member of a subordinated group, and a sense of a self that belies this social identification may result in a sense of alienation, but it is a sense of alienation that Meyers regards as desirable insofar as it provokes moral reflection and emancipatory social criticism. Reflection on the ways in which gender identities do and do not affect an individual’s sense of personal identity makes an individual self-conscious in a way that enables social critique. That some feminists have rejected theories of gender because they seem incompatible with individualized identities results, Meyers suggests, from a tendency to see gender theories as essentialist, that is, as conforming to a social-scientific epistemic model based on inductive generalizations about women. As universal generalizations about women, gender theories are easily disconfirmed by empirical data, despite the fact that elements of these theories resonate with the experiences of many women. Inspired by Marilyn Frye’s suggestion that we regard gender theories as metaphors that provide insight and understanding without asserting identity or equivalence between things, Meyers suggests that we can do justice to gender theories that, in turn, do justice to some women’s experience by viewing them as we do literary texts. Just as interpretations of literary texts seek support in passages from the texts and address seeming inconsistencies between the interpretation and other parts of the text, theories of how social constructions of gender affect individual identity provide different perspectives on the ways in which gender—as well as class, race, and sexuality—is constitutive of an identity that is nonetheless personal and individual. In reading gender theories of identity describing other socially subordinated
groups as we would literary texts, we must pay attention to the rhetorical value of the universalist tone of these theories, for this tone functions in a way similar to hyperbole and shouting: it quells disagreement and dissent. The goal, then, must be to generate theories of gender—and social practices that employ them—that allow members of subordinated groups to find their voices.

In “Identity and Free Agency,” Hilde Lindemann Nelson looks at the power that some texts—ones she refers to as master narratives—have in structuring the identities of members of oppressed groups and how they may find their voices through counterstories. Drawing on narratives from nurses, Nelson illustrates how “a powerful group’s misperception of an oppressed group results in disrespectful treatment that, as in the case of the nurses, can impede group members in carrying out their responsibilities” (50). These master narratives are morally oppressive to members of subordinated groups insofar as their capacity for normative competence is denied or diminished by the narratives. Normative competence entails not only that one is able to understand moral norms and act accordingly but also that one is capable of normative self-disclosure—that one may “reveal who one is, morally speaking, through what one does” (55).

Revealing oneself as a moral agent is a complex affair. One must see oneself as a moral agent, as morally trustworthy. But, if one sees oneself as a moral agent, this requires, in turn, that others see her as a moral agent and understand her action not only as a moral action but also as a moral action of a specific kind. Thus is a person’s identity a function of how others understand what she does, as well as how she understands what she does, and thus is free agency a function not only of an agent’s capacities and abilities but also of how others view her capacities and abilities. How others see her contributes to her understanding of herself—of what she can and should do. This gives others power to harm a person by depriving her of the identity of a morally competent agent—what Nelson calls “the harm of deprivation of opportunity”—and, in so doing, by contributing to her own sense of herself as having limited or diminished moral agency—what Nelson calls “the harm of infiltrated consciousness.” In some cases, such as that involving the narratives of the nurses cited by Nelson, this harm can be repaired by means of a counterstory that aims at changing not only the perception that the powerful have of the oppressed group but also an oppressed person’s perception of herself.

But such harm is a function not just of the means used but also of the extent to which the identities of the oppressed have been structured by these master narratives. Depending, as Nelson says, on not just how but also when a counterstory is introduced, it may or may not be possible to repair the harm of infiltrated consciousness or, at least, to right the wrong done to those whose sense of self has been undermined by oppression. Nelson cites as an
example of someone with an identity beyond narrative repair a person who has never formed any notion of her free agency because of oppressive social structures combined with personal domination in an intimate relationship.

Bat-Ami Bar On takes how others view her and how she views herself as her starting point in “Violent Bodies.” Bar On recounts how she developed her violent body first in response to the taunts of other children, then in accordance with the customs and expectations of a Jewish–Israeli youth in postindependence Israel, then as an adult Israeli citizen in military service, and finally as a feminist involved in a women’s antirape movement in the United States. Feminist suspicions and criticisms of violent bodies are grounded in the fact that it is the male violent body that is so often the means through which women experience violence, primarily in the form of rape and battery in their everyday lives and during wartime. But what, Bar On asks, are the ethical implications of her “violent body”—a body that is ready to fight and habituated to respond to violence with violence with little or no conscious reflection about this response? To frame her analysis Bar On turns to Hannah Arendt, whose work on violence is perhaps the most sustained thinking about violence undertaken by a female philosopher—or a male philosopher, for that matter. For Arendt, violent action can only be justified on ethico-political grounds, and because, as Bar On points out, we are limited in our ability to predict and control whether any action, including a violent one, will achieve the end for which it is the means, violent actions must be limited in scope and can be justified only for the short term. (Violence in self-defense is unproblematic because the danger is clear and present and the end justifying the means is immediate.) Political ends can thus justify instrumental violence and instruments like violent bodies, as long as violence is being used to halt—and not to promote—the decline of political power. Violence must always be backed by and restrained by political power, that is, the conscious and concerted action of a group of people working together not out of self-interest but out of solidarity—out of care and concern for one another and the world.

This Arendtean sense of political differs from standard feminist usage in which violence against women is political because it is made possible by a systemic matrix of domination and submission. For Arendt, systemic domination does not deserve the appellation political because people working together in concert and solidarity are central to her meaning of the term. Bar On observes that, pace Arendt, who objected to feminism insofar as it was motivated only by women’s self-interest and not by care for the world, women’s self-defense can be seen as a political project in an Arendtean understanding of the term, as can the production of violent female bodies. Because women’s project of producing violent bodies serves as an “interruption of the status quo . . . what otherwise would have proceeded automatically” (71), Bar On argues that the production of women’s violent
bodies is transgressive. As transgressive, Bar On considers it justified ethically—"as long as women do not transgress boundaries "inhumanely" and "destructively" and remain aware of, and wary about, the seductive nature of violence (71)."

That feminist ethics develops a theoretical framework and political strategies to contest the exercise of oppressive power is also of concern to Lisa Tessman, Margaret A. McLaren, Barbara S. Andrew, and Nancy Potter, each of whom analyzes how virtues of character and their realization in habituated actions contribute to these projects. Using a critical virtue ethics framework, Lisa Tessman argues that what is morally objectionable about oppression is that it interferes with human flourishing and that it does so for targeted social groups in a systematic way. Oppression does this by preventing or restricting access to "external goods" but also by preventing or hindering one in the development and exercise of the virtues and, in so doing, precluding one from acquiring a character that is part of a good life. Of particular concern to Tessman is that we examine how moral damage hinders members of oppressed groups from effectively resisting their oppression at the same time as we avoid dehumanizing the morally damaged group by treating that group as "a problem."

Analyzing how oppressive forces can interfere with human flourishing requires not only that we augment Aristotle's list of the factors interfering with flourishing by noting the systematic nature of this interference. We must also add goods that Aristotle did not recognize, including goods that are not captured under distributive paradigms. Of primary importance to Aristotle, of course, is the acquisition of those virtues the exercise of which results in a good life. Tessman adds the accompanying realization that if "there is injustice already at work in the formation of character, the fact that something is based on character does not imply that it is not also rooted in an oppressive social system" (82). The task—as Tessman, echoing Claudia Card, reminds us—is that of distinguishing the insights of the oppressed from the moral damage that results from oppression. Such damage would include the failure to develop self-esteem, the fear of being conspicuous, and the tendencies to dissemble and to ingratiate oneself or identify with one's oppressors. Such character traits typically develop as survival mechanisms when one lives under conditions of oppression, but this does not mean that they are not morally damaging as well. Indeed, some psychological traits are doubly damaging from a moral perspective insofar as they help to convince the members of the oppressed groups that their circumstances are the result not of systemic structures and forces but of their own flawed characters and psyches.

To acknowledge that some of us have the bad "moral luck" to be members of oppressed groups does not, however, relieve us of all moral responsibility for our characters, even if their formation does not lie completely within our control. There is, of course, considerable risk of harm
to members of oppressed groups in speaking of moral damage. Tessman illustrates this risk in recounting how the concept of the “damaged black psyche” became the justification for opposing changes in oppressive social structures and forces. This argument proceeds from the assumption that once the psychic damage has been done, the repair needed should come from neither economic assistance nor political empowerment but, rather, from the inculcation of “character-building” values, usually conceived of as “family values” where the heads of household are male. Indeed, an extreme version of this argument reverses the causal sequence, arguing that character deficiencies are the cause and not the consequence of such economic states as welfare dependency, despite the fact that historically economic opportunities for blacks have been so severely restricted, either in the number of opportunities or in the amount of compensation, as to be at times virtually nonexistent. Acknowledging that talk of moral damage is risky, Tessman points out that one does not have to choose between working to change structural causes of oppression and attempting to repair moral damage. Even more importantly, she suggests that changes in systemic structures and forces while necessary to undo the oppression of social groups may not be sufficient to repair the moral damage that is part of their oppression. Tessman thus proposes that radical strategies of resistance to oppression include a critical virtue ethics, for, among other things, the moral damage done to members of oppressed groups may interfere with their abilities to form such strategies of resistance. Equally important, those who have been morally damaged because of oppression have “responsibilities of their own,” Card has observed, “to their peers and descendants.”

In “Feminist Ethics: Care as a Virtue,” Margaret McLaren provides an example of how a traditionally female trait such as caring can be a resource for a feminist ethics that bases its approach in critical virtue theory. The concept of care is problematic for feminist ethics because some theorists have argued that defining care as characteristic of women and other subordinated groups is instrumental in their oppression. Such definitions can serve to “naturalize” and perpetuate oppression and can be morally damaging to the extent that women sacrifice their own interests for the interests of others, including those of their oppressors. In so doing, women fail to develop their own identity, autonomy, resources, and moral agency. However, other theorists have considered care to be a female trait that provides a foundation for a feminist ethics. McLaren argues that care ethics of the sort inspired by the work of Carol Gilligan is a feminine but not a feminist ethics because, among other things, it reinscribes the stereotypes of women that have structured and perpetuated the oppression of women. Still, McLaren insists that the concepts developed by feminist philosophers in response to care ethics provide us with the resources we need for a feminist virtue ethics.
That care has been seen as a virtue of women rather than of men is *prima facie* problematic, for seeing virtues as gender related has been one way in which ethical theory has contributed to and perpetuated oppression. Because virtue ethics is not innocent in the matter of women's oppression does not mean, however, that it has nothing to offer to feminist ethics. McLaren, like Tessman, believes that a *critical* virtue theory has much to recommend it as a normative ethical theory, for, unlike deontological theories, virtue ethics assumes that the moral agent is an embodied member of a community and, in so doing, addresses what is concrete and particular in moral situations. This becomes especially clear once we consider the attention that virtue theory pays to the contributions of character, practical judgment, emotions, and moral perception in deliberating about actions and motives.

Virtue ethics holds that human flourishing—and how one's community contributes or does not contribute to such flourishing—is both a condition for and a consequence of a moral life. Following Joan Tronto, McLaren argues that the concept of care should be *extended into the political realm* with the consequence that the boundary between morality and politics—or the public and the private—is erased. When this boundary goes, so should the notion that women's virtues are those of the domestic sphere in contrast to those virtues (which, if not feminine, are presumably masculine) that allow the formulation of abstract, "universal," moral principles—principles that appear to be universal only in the public, and not the private, sphere. Finally, conceiving of care as a public or political virtue incorporates a concern for justice—the concern that care ethics allegedly slights. A *feminist* ethics that conceives of care as a political virtue will be a virtue ethics informed by feminist politics but not one in which care is the only virtue. McLaren suggests that other virtues in a feminist virtue theory would include such things as feistiness and playfulness, in addition to more readily recognized virtues of self-respect, openness, courage, and self-awareness.

The importance of contesting the image of the ethical woman as caring to the extent of being the "Angel in the House" prompts Barbara Andrew to look for another image of the ethical woman in "Angels, Rubbish Collectors, and Pursuers of Erotic Joy: The Image of the Ethical Woman." Like McLaren, Andrew insists that the virtue of care should not be understood as exemplified primarily or solely by the domestic nurturer and proposes instead that we take seriously Michel Foucault's claim that ethics has its origins in "the care of the self." As Foucault understands it, such care aims at a telos—"the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way"—and thus does Andrew seek the telos of feminist ethics—the ideal image of the moral agent that inspires the ethical self to action. Andrew holds, as do Tessman and McLaren, that feminist moral action is political action and that care properly understood neglects neither the moral autonomy necessary for political action nor justice as both a means and an
end of political action. Indeed, it is Andrew’s claim that the ideal of ethical relationship that care ethics has helped to formulate necessarily involves autonomy and that the recognition of this ideal provides care ethics with an alternative telos to that of the Angel in the House. According to Andrew, the notion of ethical relationship fulfills the same function in care ethics that the notion of autonomy does in ethical theories centering on justice: each acts as a condition for moral actions and judgments, but each depends, in turn, on the existence of social conditions that provide the basic goods that enable its exercise. Thus, feminist ethics needs a telos that incorporates both care and autonomy.

The ideal image(s) of the ethical woman must recognize the importance of our desires both for connection with others and for autonomy; this is not accomplished by bifurcating between the (good) image of the Angel in the House and the (bad) image of the “Woman of the Streets.” Following a suggestion of Drucilla Cornell’s, Andrew considers the chiffonnier—the junk or rubbish collector—as an image of the ethical woman. As a chiffonnier, the ethical woman sifts through the remnants of philosophical theories and systems for useful strategies for feminist political and ethical action. As such, she gives up the dream of the perfect philosophical system or theory, the one that will guarantee her neither loss nor oppression, and accepts that she must improvise strategies that allow her to both engage the other and care for the self. Still, even this image of the ethical woman lacks an ingredient that Andrew thinks is essential to the image of the ethical woman: the recognition of the imaginary, the domain in which, as Cornell notes, we as embodied, sexual creatures imagine ourselves as free and autonomous as we fulfill our desires for ourselves and for others. Cornell observes that the imaginary domain as such can only be accommodated within an abstract ideal of subjectivity: “Defining the person only through a normative outline . . . [is] the only way we can preserve freedom of the personality.” In this way we employ the concept of the abstract person in our political analyses as one who determines for herself her values, including how best to love, even though these values have their source beyond her. In an attempt to do justice to the imaginary, Andrew turns to Simone de Beauvoir’s image of woman as pursuing erotic joy as she creates “found art” and negotiates her sexual and caring relationships with others in order to experience the joys of connection and of freedom. For Beauvoir, the erotic relationship provides the paradigm of our existence as subjects who care for ourselves and connect with others while also existing as Others for subjects who, too, desire both freedom and connection with us. Andrew concludes that whatever ethical images we propose must acknowledge that we participate with each other in relationships of power.

Nancy Potter also raises a question about our responsibilities to others in her chapter “Is Refusing to Forgive a Vice?” Potter agrees with Tessman,
McLaren, and Andrew that our moral evaluations should take the form not of testing whether our actions are instances of a universal moral principle but of asking whether an action and the disposition to which it attests are deficient or excessive—*virtuous* or *vicious*—in the context in which they occur. Potter notes that when moral theorists are asked about forgiveness they are prone to take the concept out of a religious context but are nonetheless willing to assert its central place in our moral lives. Indeed, forgiveness is commonly viewed as moral because it indicates that one who has been wronged has overcome (justifiably) negative feelings toward the person or persons responsible for the harm or injury. These negative feelings include such feelings as resentment, and the presumption is that giving in to such negative feelings indicates some moral lapse or weakness on the part of the one who has failed to overcome them. An injured party who forgives believes that the harm or injury perpetuated by the wrongdoer was morally wrong and that the wrongdoer is responsible for the action. Nonetheless, the injured party overcomes negative feelings toward the wrongdoer. In such a view, the act of forgiveness suggests that the wrongdoer in some sense transcends the harmful acts committed in the past. Accordingly, some moral theorists speak of the empathy with the wrongdoer that allows forgiveness and of the state of restoration or reconciliation that is its aim.

But Potter contends that this view of forgiveness fails to take into account that when forgiveness is viewed as a virtue there are situations in which its exercise can be seen as an excess or a deficiency. She notes that Jeffrie Murphy, for example, observes that we cannot be obligated to forgive another—or seek restoration or reconciliation at any cost—if doing so indicates that we lack self-respect, that we do not count ourselves as equal in moral importance to others. In Murphy’s view, forgiveness must be compatible with respect for both oneself and others as members of a moral community. Using this criterion, there will be cases in which both the action of forgiving another and the disposition to forgive will count as vices. Potter finds a case in which forgiveness would be a vice in Dorothy Allison’s novel, *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Bone, the protagonist in the novel, suffers repeated beatings at the hands of her stepfather—beatings about which her mother knows and which she sometimes tries to help her daughter escape. However, Bone’s mother is unable to choose her daughter’s well-being over what she perceives as her own—remaining with her husband. The husband’s ultimatum that his wife choose him over her daughter takes the form of raping Bone, a rape that Bone’s mother witnesses. Although Bone’s mother and stepfather—and the larger community of which they are a part—are victims of the oppression suffered by poor whites in America’s rural South, an oppression that Bone recognizes she shares with the members of her family, Bone refuses to forgive them for her injuries. As Potter notes, Bone has no reason to either forgive or
seek a reconciliation with her stepfather, who scarcely acknowledges his wrongdoing or repents for it. There is no positive relationship that Bone can restore with him, no point to any reconciliation. Her resentment of her mother and her failure to forgive her, while clearly painful to Bone because she has given up the opportunity to recover her mother’s love, may be necessary if Bone is to realize that she has suffered an injury that she did not deserve. Thus may Bone’s refusal to forgive be seen, Potter suggests, as the mean between excess and deficiency, for it signals her respect for herself—and others—as members of a moral community, as moral agents who have a right to expect that injustice be punished. To refuse to allow a wrong to go unpunished, to refuse to forgive when to do so would be to diminish one’s moral worth—and thereby commit a further injury and injustice to oneself—can hardly be counted as a vice.

In “Gender and Moral Reasoning Revisited: Reengaging Feminist Psychology,” Phyllis Rooney argues, too, that feminists should redirect their attention to the situational character of both gender and moral psychology, specifically with the aim of enhancing our understanding of moral reasoning. Rooney shares the concern expressed by many of the contributors to this volume that, in talk of care and justice as different voices in moral deliberations, we fail to notice that some of these voices are the voices of the oppressed. Empirical studies conducted subsequent to those described in Gilligan’s In a Different Voice contest the claim that males are more likely than females to have a disposition for moral rationalism,16 that is, an enthusiasm for systematizing abstract rules and general principles and for seeing the primary values of moral agency as consisting in autonomy, consistency, and control. But the issue—as Rooney insists—is not merely a factual one, for traditional accounts of moral reasoning have asserted men’s superiority as a sex over women precisely insofar as men have this proclivity toward moral rationalism and women do not. Indeed, the justification that one so often finds for denying women moral rationality is women’s presumed inferiority at reasoning in this fashion. Thus does Rooney express the same concern as other contributors that “in the feminist literature there has been an insufficient reading against the grain of this traditional supposition” (156). She is especially concerned that the “care voice” attributed to women is characterized as eschewing abstract principles in favor of attending to the concrete aspects and contextual features of a moral situation. Rooney notes the imprecision with which abstract is used in such a characterization of the care ethic and points out that “abstracting from a (multifaceted) moral situation with respect to particular kinds of relationships and responsibilities among individuals in it, and not with respect to the specific juridical rights of those individuals as autonomous agents, is one way of abstracting from the situation; another way involves abstracting with respect to the latter and not the former (and these, clearly, need not be the only way of abstracting)” (156–57).
Rooney cites the psychological research of the past two decades that contests the view of earlier research, like Gilligan's, according to which gender consists of more or less stable intrapsychic traits and dispositions. More recent research suggests that gender is also very much a social category, one that social regulation works to produce, perpetuate, and reinforce through gender norms, practices, and expectations that can be related to power differentials. Empirical studies suggest that modifications of the experimental situation can result in the appearance—or disappearance—of gender differences and that the political dimension of different research programs may do so as well. Prompted by the possibility that Gilligan's work "exaggerates differences in disposition between women and men and overlooks differences in social structure, such as power differentials that press for different behavior in the two sexes," Nancy Clopton and Gwendolyn Sorell have studied the extent to which gender is stable versus situational in instances of moral reasoning. Their conclusion is that gender differences in the orientation of moral reasoning result more from "differences in current life situation than from stable gender characteristics." Rooney concludes that their study suggests that if care and justice apply to something, it is "to different kinds of moral situations in the kinds of responses they evoke" (161).

Rooney takes this shift to a more situational view of gender in moral reasoning as an impetus toward a more situational view of cognition, but she stresses that situated reasoning is not the same thing as contextual reasoning. "Care reasoning" may be contextual in a way that "justice reasoning" is supposedly not, but both kinds of moral reasoning—indeed, all kinds of moral reasoning—are situated. If one set of moral reasoners is prone to use "rights and principles" talk, we need to ask what it is about the situation of these reasoners that constrains them to reason this way. Because gender is often a salient characteristic of social location—one constructed and situated through particular norms and expectations—we may find that the gender of reasoners affects how they construct their "situat edness" and that, in specific social locations, men and women will construct their situatedness differently.

Of particular importance for ethics is that recent psychological work has given an active role to moral situations, prompting Rooney to remark that "situations, thoughtfully encountered, can bring morality to people: it is not simply that people bring morality (in the form of some 'inner' capacities and virtues, consistent sets of moral principles, and so on) to situations" (164). If ethicists have failed to recognize the extent to which this is true, it may be because the hypothetical situations often described when presenting moral problems are, as Rooney stresses, preselected for the limited forms of moral rationality they employ. Indeed, the models of cognition that they employ only scarcely apply to moral problems as distinct from mathematical or logical ones. Whether the moral situation is found in life or in literature, humans employ more cognitive and affective capacities than those exhibited in the
artificial and hypothetical situations of ethical theory. Rooney asserts that these cognitive and affective capacities, "with moral practice and the development of moral integrity, enhance rather than diminish the range of human reasoning capacities" (164). Her recommendation is that feminist theorists operate with a more sophisticated picture of moral reasoning.

James Lindemann Nelson provides a complex picture of moral reasoning in his "Constructing Feelings: Jane Austen and Naomi Scheman on the Moral Role of Emotions." Nelson analyzes the views of moral reasoning presented by certain characters in Jane Austen’s Sense and Sensibility and uses this analysis to critique Naomi Scheman’s account of the role of emotions in moral cognition. According to Nelson, Austen is concerned not merely with how character is developed in the Dashwood daughters but also with the "set of socially created and renewed resources" that contribute to the construction of feelings, the direction of action, and the intelligibility of the world. Indeed, that Austen captures the effects that emotions have on moral reasoning with such clarity and elegance is what prompts Nelson to see her novel as a kind of exercise in moral cognition. Nelson suggests that we might view Austen herself as refuting the view, expressed by the character of Marianne, that "feelings as such reliably indicate where propriety lies." Nelson’s own view of the emotions’ contributions to moral epistemology is more positive than Austen’s, whose position in Sense and Sensibility appears also to be at odds with much recent feminist theory devoted to the positive role that emotions play in moral reasoning.

Nelson’s take is also at odds with Naomi Scheman’s views on the role of emotion in moral reasoning. Scheman holds that one of the primary functions of emotions is to provide for the possibility of moral objectivity; emotions are socially constructed and essential to moral judgment. Nelson reads Scheman as saying that, as a social construction, an emotion is not a state of an individual and does not have the kind of causal relations that provide for its existence as an entity independent of a social context. In Scheman’s view, one could not experience an emotion outside of a social context that relates feelings, sensations, thoughts, and behavior in ways that provide for a coherent explanation; or, as Nelson observes, "Scheman’s view . . . entails that emotions are not identifiable in terms of their causal effectiveness outside of particular forms of social practices and explanations" (169).

For Nelson, the ontological status of emotions—whether they exist as functions of explanatory schemes or whether they can be individuated apart from their role in social explanations—has important consequences for moral reasoning. He finds Scheman’s account unclear regarding the conative or representational force of emotions—a force that he thinks is especially important when an emotion is discordant with some of our beliefs. For Nelson, emotions can and often do reveal what is morally salient in a situation; in support of this claim he cites Richmond Campbell’s analysis of fear as a rep-
representation that one is in imminent danger and Alison Jaggar's account of the importance of "outlaw emotions."\(^{20}\) The problem Nelson finds with Scheman's account of the moral role of emotions is that if emotions are functions of social explanations, the best that outlaw emotions can do is identify alternative strategies to the dominant strategy under which these emotions are deemed "outside of the law." Yet Scheman sees confrontations between explanatory strategies as contributing to the search for moral objectivity; to attain it requires a set of stable and sharable beliefs to emerge from challenges by the widest possible set of alternatives. Nelson does not see how emotions, \textit{as Scheman characterizes them,} can contribute to the resolution of these contests. If emotions only exist within social explanations, can conflicting emotions indicate anything other than the existence of multiple explanatory strategies? Can they indicate that one strategy is more morally defensible than another? Nelson thinks that emotions can represent the world as being a certain way because they do have causal powers that individuate them independently of an explanatory scheme. Citing Scheman's discussion of the disagreement between the mother and son in \textit{Torch Song Trilogy} as to whether the son's feelings of loss over his deceased homosexual lover are analogous to the mother's feelings of loss for her deceased husband, Nelson observes that there is nothing inferential or interpretative about the son's suffering. The son does not have to determine whether his emotion is located in an explanatory scheme, and it is difficult to believe that his mother would not recognize it as suffering—whether or not it qualified on her scheme as conjugal grief. Or, as Nelson observes about anger, "social practices might affect anger in many ways—trigger it, shape it, control what counts as acceptable expression of it, associate it and the forms of its expression in different ways according to gender or class—but not by providing it with the conditions that are essential to its having its identity at all" (179). He notes, in a similar vein, that although in \textit{Sense and Sensibility} Marianne and her sister, Elinor, have different views of the explanatory scheme that holds that "feelings as such reliably indicate where propriety lies," Elinor does not deny that Marianne feels what she feels. Marianne's defense of her emotions and of their role in her view of propriety suggests that Marianne's emotions, \textit{pace} Austen, may not have been so unreliable after all. Indeed, one might argue that these "outlaw emotions" represented the moral indefensibility of an explanatory scheme that causes women to feel so much shame over having done so little harm.

In the concluding section of this volume contributors discuss how the insights of feminist ethics can be applied in specific social contexts. Joan C. Tronto, whose \textit{Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care} has influenced many contemporary theorists—including contributors to this volume—urges those working in professional ethics to follow feminists in their examination of the meanings assigned to moral principles in reflexive
moral practices. In “Does Managing Professionals Affect Professional Ethics? Competence, Autonomy, and Care,” she examines the claim—frequently criticized by those whose job it is to manage professionals—that formulating and monitoring ethical standards for the professions is properly left to their practitioners. Professionals defend their right to devise their own standards by appealing to notions of professional autonomy and professional competence. More than one feminist theorist has pointed out the ways in which professionals tend to cast themselves as autonomous (masculine) figures who are nearly heroic, who have to struggle to maintain their autonomy against controlling (feminine) managers who resort to manipulation and indirection. Tronto believes that the notion of managing professionals is ethically dubious, and she thinks that the best way for professionals to make this case is to extend their idea of competence beyond knowing and applying technical expertise to include “caring well.” “Caring well” should not be equated with providing a “reasonable standard of care,” which is usually understood to be a matter of conforming to a set of technical requirements, for caring well involves focusing not merely on the requirements of the moment but on the entire caring process. Accordingly, the competent professional—the caregiver—must be not only technically competent but also attentive, responsible, and responsive. This will entail, among other things, using “multiple perspectives to make certain that care is not being distorted by relations of power and imposed or ignored needs” (192).

But professional autonomy, and not just professional competence, needs to be reconceptualized if one is to find a solution to the problem of regulating professionals other than introducing nonprofessional managers. Tronto suggests that traditional views of professional autonomy tend to see professional practice as consisting of a relation of only two parties: professional and client (patient). But this picture neglects the extent to which professional activities as they are currently carried out involve contributions from a number of other professionals. Tronto notes empirical studies suggesting that the greater the extent that professionals see themselves as a team and to the extent that they are willing to see each others as equals and to acknowledge their vulnerabilities to other members of the team, the less likely they will be to find their work stressful and the more likely the team will be effective. Professionals who see themselves as separated from others with whom they work—and from their clients—because of differentials of power, distance, and professional hierarchies are less likely to communicate and acknowledge the possibility of error. Tronto suggests that professional competence should be understood as a quality exhibited not so much by individuals as by teams or groups of professionals. Professional autonomy may then be seen as requiring professionals to take responsibility for the organizations of their professions, including their relationships with other professionals. In so doing, all professionals need to see themselves as similar to those of us in
society who also give care and not as markedly different from others because of their professional competence. They need to see professional ethics as not so different from the ethical responsibilities of people in society generally.

The self-definition of many professionals emphasizes having expert knowledge—and a "calling"—that differentiates them from others. Thus do they claim to be self-regulating, wrapping themselves, as Tronto says, in their "cloak of competence" and denying that nonprofessional managers are qualified to challenge their professional judgment. Tronto suggests that professionals are, perhaps, even more concerned than others to assert their autonomy and demand the kind of self-control denied others for fear that their professions will be seen as like the more "feminine" caring professions. Given the extent to which contemporary society seems committed to "flat hierarchies," professionals may worry that their work is being devalued, and they may feel the need to reassert its value. But defending the value of one's own profession by devaluing the work of others seems unlikely to be a successful strategy in the long run. As a result, Tronto proposes that the professions give up their claim to a special status based on their possession of expert knowledge that differentiates them from others. She urges, instead, that they acknowledge that they are able to care for others as a consequence of their competence and that caring well requires working with other professionals. Finally, she urges them to view caring well as central to the practice of all professions. They will then hold themselves and others with whom they work to the same standard as we would hold anyone else in society—to a standard that includes the responsibility to care for others.

Natalie Brender is also concerned with care as an ethical concept in the public sphere. Brender begins by recounting historical antecedents in which ethical theorists, usually men, have expressed anxiety about the shortcomings of those, usually women, who allow emotions or emotional dispositions such as care to dictate actions and policies in the public realm. Still, care can be a problematic concept in the political sphere, as Brender notes in her discussion of humanitarian relief. Suffering is prolonged rather than reduced if and when humanitarian relief permits political power to remain with those who are responsible for initiating and perpetuating the conditions causing the suffering. Brender argues that we must cultivate a degree of analytical detachment when responding to graphic representations of the suffering of those sufficiently distant from us that we are uncertain of the suffering's causes and the consequences of our financial help. Brender cites Margaret Walker's work on representational practices and moral recognition to argue that the "moral graphics" of many calls for humanitarian relief seem designed to block recognition by the audience that the suffering being represented is occurring in a specific sociopolitical and economic context. Brender takes Walker's implications to be that "such a failure of recognition is not consequentially but intrinsically ethically deficient" (209) and that "notwithstanding the images'
success in producing a salutary emotional and practical response, it is grounds for ethical criticism of the images that they foster a cognitive failure of recognition" (209). Brender wants to insist, however, that analytical detachment of the kind required to respond ethically to these images is not incompatible with care. Drawing on the work of Joan Tronto, Brender suggests problematic aspects of Western audience members responding to images of, say, starving children—and “showing that they care”—by writing checks to relief agencies. Care, as Tronto has pointed out, differs in terms of its object(s): one can care about someone in the sense of being generally concerned for her well-being and can care for someone, which requires attention to another’s needs—physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and psychic.22 Both of these can be done well or poorly, and to care well one must have knowledge about the needs, priorities, and demands of the specific situation and choose the appropriate course of action using the correct means. Writing a check to a relief agency is not an instance of caring for those who are suffering. Rather, it indicates that one cares about their suffering, although not enough to investigate the cause(s) of their suffering. It is true that the humanitarian response may be inhibited if emotional appeals are accompanied by political analysis, but Brender notes that there is also a danger that those confronted with repeated images will cease to respond altogether. What makes both compassion and analytic detachment possible—and not inherently incompatible—is the cognitive content as well as the corrigibility of emotions. Representations that fail to acknowledge these aspects of our emotional lives will, in the final analysis, be short-lived and limited in their effectiveness to provoke responses—humanitarian or otherwise.

Alison Bailey is also concerned with how feminism can inform analyses of political and social problems—but in a different context. She is concerned with how we conceive of our responsibility for hate crimes in the communities of which we are members. She cites the crimes committed against Bridget Ward, an African American single head of household, after moving to Bridesburg, a suburban area sometimes characterized as one of “Philadelphia’s best kept secrets.” Ward and her family moved out of their house in Bridesburg in less than two months because of repeated threats and acts of violence against them. Some residents of Bridesburg decried the hate campaign against the Ward family and insisted that they were not racists, that this campaign was the work of a “few bad apples,” and that the community as a whole did not want to be blamed for the acts of violence. In a traditional view of collective responsibility—what Bailey refers to as the liberal response—a group is assigned responsibility for harms perpetrated by some of its members and it is the group’s responsibility to hold the individual perpetrators accountable for their (past) actions. The focus, as Bailey notes, is “on the relationships between individuals in groups and the causal contribution each makes to a particular state of affairs,” (221) and the perspective taken
on this state of affairs is primarily down and backward, that is, those who neither contributed to nor were the victims of the harmful act assign responsibility to other members of their group for what these members have already done. In this view, the residents of Bridesburg are discharging whatever responsibility they have in condemning the members of their community who performed the acts. Bailey, echoing concerns of other feminists, argues that the liberal account of collective responsibility is inadequate in the case of hate crimes. It fails to acknowledge that the identity of the victim is not incidental to the crime; rather, this individual was chosen to be the victim of the crime because he or she was a member of a targeted group. As a result, this conception of collective responsibility fails to recognize the social and systemic dimensions of the particular act of violence and thus conceives of responsibility too narrowly. "To fully address the harms resulting from practices such as rape, gay bashing, and racially motivated violence," Bailey says, "our notion of responsibility must look beyond the moral moment of the crime itself" (222). Such crimes are a consequence not only of isolated intentions and actions of individuals but also of a social system of oppression, and thus we must consider the roles that communities play in keeping in place systems that increase the likelihood of such intentions and actions.

As part of her analysis, Bailey cites Larry May's work on collective responsibility. May recognizes that the attitudes of a community toward minority groups may increase the odds that hate crimes will occur in a community.23 In May's account of shared responsibility, then, members of a community are held responsible for their attitudes and should look not only "down and backward" but also forward to changing the shared attitudes that foster a tolerance of hate crimes in the community. Still, Bailey worries that this attempt to share responsibility focuses only on the attitudes, feelings, and behavior of the majority members of the community and not on the minority members who have been the victims of the hate crimes. Bailey wonders how successful this endeavor to change the majority's attitude toward the population's minority members can be if the latter's views and experiences are not taken into consideration. Indeed, she speculates that the motivation for preventing any further hate crimes from occurring in this community may well be the result of shame rather than genuine concern for the well-being of others. The problem, as Claudia Card has observed, is that what we see when we look up and forward will vary with our social location.24 If one is "at home" in one's community, one may have a great deal of difficulty not only in understanding why others feel ill at ease but also in knowing what causes them to have such feelings. Invoking Maria Lugones's notion of "world traveling,"25 Bailey suggests that we view oppressed members of a society as those who have to world travel out of necessity in the hope of escaping their oppression. In so doing, they are forced to travel to
places where they are not "at home" and where even well-meaning others may see them as outsiders. Those who inhabit positions of privilege travel to other worlds when, if, and how they choose and are at least predisposed to feel at ease wherever they are. As long as the "outsiders" remain the subject of conversation rather than a party to it, those who are privileged are unlikely to have any idea of whether and how their actions—even well-intentioned ones—contribute to the "outsider" being ill at ease. In place of May's notion of shared responsibility, Bailey thus proposes a more open-ended account of responsibility in which we see ourselves as "acting with" rather than "acting for" the victims of hate crimes. In this account of responsibility, we need to ask how a community should respond to prevent future harmful acts as well as past ones. In so doing, we need to include in our discussions of responsibility those who have been—and may be—harmed by hate crimes. Bailey closes by citing the example of Billings, Montana, a community that mobilized itself in the face of a series of hate crimes against African Americans, Jews, and Native Americans. In this case, various organizations and community members, prompted by the suggestions and support of community leaders, demonstrated their opposition to those who had committed these hate crimes, their support of the victims of the crimes, and their intention of preventing any such crimes in the future. They engaged in such activities as attending services with the victims at their (defaced) church, displaying menorahs in their windows, and repairing the damaged homes of the victims. Such acts of solidarity exhibit the kind of collective responsibility that empowers moral communities and their members.

Empowering moral communities and their members must be a goal of ethical theory as long as moral authority and moral responsibility are necessary for us to survive and flourish. Achieving this end requires an analysis of how power is implicated in the moral structure of our social practices. In other words, we must do what feminists who do ethics—especially those in this volume—have done: see power in morality and morality in power. This is, we think, no small achievement.

NOTES

1. The Feminist Ethics Revisited Conference was sponsored by the Department of Philosophy and the Ethics Center of the University of South Florida and took place in October 1999 in Clearwater, Florida. The palpable excitement of the participants at this conference was the impetus for us—along with Hilde Lindemann Nelson and Sara Ruddick, the editors of the Feminist Constructions Series at Rowman and Littlefield—to pursue the publication of this volume. It includes expanded versions of a number of the papers presented at the conference and some essays not presented there. We would like to thank all who contributed to the conference and to the volume.


4. An earlier but classic work on the subject is, of course, Georges Sorel's 1906 volume, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. T. E. Hulme (New York: Peter Smith, 1941). Since the last decade of the twentieth century has seen the publication of many new studies on violence, there may soon be works added to those of Sorel and Arendt.


DesAutels and Waugh


22. Tronto, Moral Boundaries.

