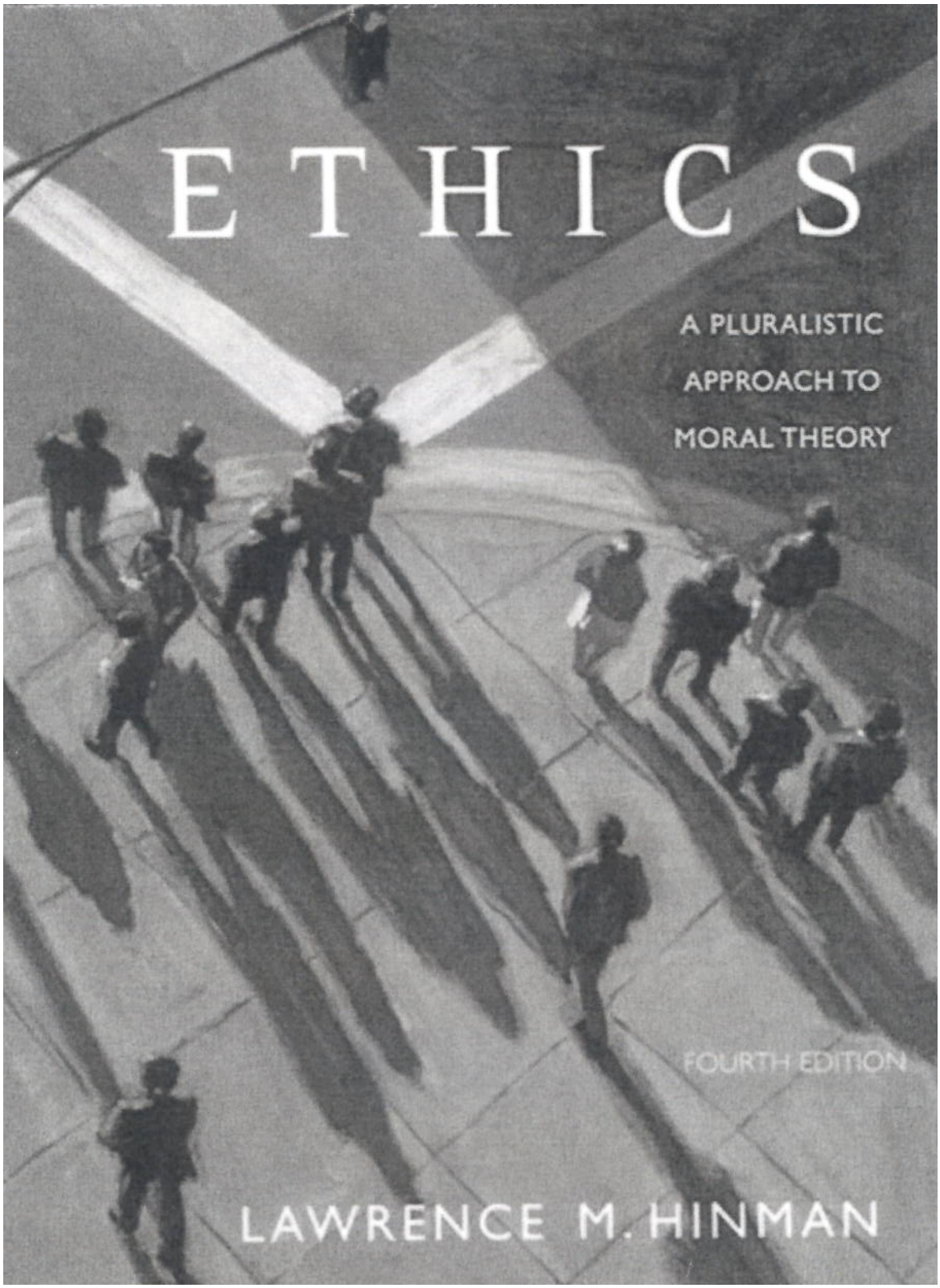
ETHICS
A PLURALISTIC APPROACH TO MORAL THEORY
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LAWRENCE M. HINMAN

CHAPTER 10

THE ETHICS OF DIVERSITY: GENDER

Introduction

Even a cursory glance at the history of moral philosophy reveals that this is a discipline that was written *by* men. Just look back over the major moral theorists discussed in this book: Aristotle, Kant, and Mill. All men. There are some rare exceptions such as Mary Wollstonecraft, but they are decidedly exceptions and seldom acknowledged in the histories of moral philosophy written by men. Moreover, closer inspection reveals that it is also a discipline almost exclusively *about* men's moral experiences. The moral life of women was largely ignored or, when discussed at all, often misunderstood. Until recently, moral philosophy was by men and for men.

This has changed radically in recent years. Women's moral voices have come to play a major role in the development of moral theory in a way that had never occurred in the past. Indeed, those voices have reshaped our understanding of the history of moral philosophy, introduced new and fundamental concepts into moral theory, and have drawn the attention of both men and women to previously neglected moral issues. Let's consider each of these three areas, beginning with the ways in which women's moral voices have helped us to see the distortions of traditional moral theory. Then we will turn to a consideration of the ways in which women's voices have introduced new moral concepts into ethical theory, concentrating on the example of Carol Gilligan's work on an ethics of care. Finally, we shall look at the moral issues that emerge as significant after women's moral voices are allowed into the discussion.

The Canon

It is difficult to appreciate the enormity of the exclusion of women from the history of ethics. To think that century after century, men and women exist side by side, confronting and reflecting on life's moral dilemmas—and yet, if one looks at the history of moral thought, it would seem as though women hardly existed. The canon of ethical theory—Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Mill, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Marx, Ayer, Moore, Wittgenstein—is notable for the absence of women.

What are we to make of this absence? Certainly part of what we want to say is that there were female moral philosophers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Harriet Taylor and that they were often omitted from histories of ethics, despite the quality of their work. And of course, after they were excluded, they could no longer influence subsequent generations of thinkers, including other women. Part of the philosophical effort of rethinking the history of ethics centers on recovering the work of excluded authors like Wollstonecraft and Taylor.

We cannot, I think, conclude from the exclusion of women from the history of ethical theory that no one ever spoke on behalf of women's moral experience. John Stuart Mill's "The Subjection of Women" (1869) argues eloquently and forcefully against any attempt to relegate women to secondary moral status. Yet this is an exception, and the vast majority of moral philosophers simply ignored women's moral experiences or interpreted them solely from a man's standpoint.

The absence of women's moral voices, coupled with the exclusion or distortion of women's moral experiences, had serious implications for moral theory. Many contemporary feminist ethical theorists have argued that traditional moral theory is marked by several distortions. Let's examine several of these. As we shall see, these feminist criticisms parallel some of the criticisms of ethical theory that we have already seen earlier.

Autonomous Man

The starting point of modern moral theory—and this includes Hobbes, Locke, Mill, and Kant—is the isolated individual, separate from everyone else and seemingly independent. The central task of moral philosophy then becomes one of constructing an account of how such individuals ought to treat one another, how they can be brought together into some kind of harmonious coexistence. It is, essentially, an ethics of strangers, a set of rules for governing the interactions of people who neither know nor care about one another. Human beings, traditional theories tell us, begin in a state of

nature where everyone is at war with one another. The challenge of morality is to provide both a motivation and a blueprint for peaceful coexistence.

Feminist moral philosophers have pointed out that this is a very odd picture of the human world and a picture that is in fact very much removed from reality. When we discuss the work of Carol Gilligan, we will see the ways in which she emphasizes the connectedness among human beings—a connectedness that women are more likely to recognize than are men. Indeed, many feminist moral philosophers have pointed out that the basic state of human beings in the world is one of connectedness and relationship. Caroline Whitbeck, for example, argues that people come to know and understand themselves through one another and that the basic unit is not the isolated individual but rather the mother-child combination. After the primacy of relationships is recognized, the nature of morality looks quite different. Whereas in traditional moral theories morality is designed to govern the interactions of autonomous strangers, feminist accounts of moral theory suggest that the focus of the moral life is primarily one of preserving relationships.

Social Contract Theory

When moral philosophers asked how autonomous man entered into moral relationships, they often replied by outlining some kind of contract theory. Individuals freely chose to subject themselves to certain rules from which everyone would presumably derive long-term benefit. Indeed, one of the powerful moral metaphors in social philosophy since the time of Rousseau (1712–1778) has been the social contract: Society is seen as a voluntary association of independent agents. John Rawls's account of the original position in his *Theory of Justice* (1971) and *Political Liberalism* (1993) continues this long tradition, and we find other versions of social contract approaches to morality in works such as David Gauthier's *Moral by Agreement* (1987), Russell Hardin's *Morality within the Limits of Reason* (1990), and Bernard Gert's *Morality: A New Justification for the Rules* (1989). Morality within this tradition is seen as the coming together of strangers who are guided largely by self-interest.

There are at least three ways in which this picture of morality as a social contract can be misleading. If we look at an early account of social contract such as Rousseau's, we see an account of the social contract that recognizes gender differences, but it does so in a way that clearly places women at a disadvantage. Rousseau's account of the social contract is certainly one of the most influential in history, but when we look at his picture of the education of those who would enter into that contract, we see how deeply gender bias affected his account of the world. In *Émile* (1762), Rousseau describes the virtues to be cultivated in this education of this autonomous man (Émile): fortitude, temperance, justice, and so forth. But when he turns to a discussion of Sophie, Émile's mate, Rousseau encourages quite different virtues

such as patience, subservience, and flexibility—virtues that, not accidentally, make Sophie an ideal supporting character in Émile's life.

The dominant form of contract theory today avoids these kinds of distortions, but it does so at a high cost. Rawls, for example, urges us to consider what fundamental rules ought to govern society. We are to do this by imagining that we do not know what our specific position in life will be. We place ourselves behind a "veil of ignorance" about such matters and then ask what the basic rules ought to be—and from this we can deduce the fundamentals of justice. However, there is something odd here. The need for such a contract is created by imagining oneself stripped of all individual identity. The social contract is, in effect, an answer to a problem that it created itself. (Not all feminists reject social contract theory, as we shall see later in our discussion of Susan Moller Okin's work on the family.)

In contrast to this notion of a social contract among strangers of equal power, the moral philosopher Annette Baier has argued that the fundamental moral glue that holds society together is not contractual at all. Trust, she argues, antedates contracts. The basic moral fabric of society is woven from threads of trust, and trust is essentially grounded in relationships. Again, we begin to see the importance of the family because it is in the relationship between infant and parents that trust is first established. We do not come into the world as rational economic actors, but rather as helpless infants totally dependent on others for our survival.

Impartiality and Universality

The third way in which traditional ethical theory has been distorted is in its emphasis on impartiality and universality. The ideal moral agent is a being who has been stripped of personal identity (including gender, race, ethnicity, and personal relations). In the Kantian tradition, this is the ideal rational agent, who acts on the basis of maxims that can be willed as universal laws of humanity. In utilitarianism, the ideal moral agent is an impartial calculator, one who adds up the hedons and dolors associated with various courses of action and then chooses the alternative that produces the greatest amount of utility. Again, there is no room for individuality or what philosophers now call *moral particularity*. The ideal utilitarian is an impartial moral agent who acts the same way any other moral agent would act.

In its search for universality, traditional ethical theory often demands that we strip ourselves precisely of those things that, in the eyes of many feminist philosophers, constitute our humanness. We are our relationships, they say, yet it is precisely these relationships to which the traditional demand for impartiality denies moral legitimacy. Traditional moral theory delights in posing dilemmas like Godwin's, where we must choose between saving the life of our mother or the life of some famous individual who clearly contributes greatly to the good of humanity. Presuming that our identity as children and perhaps also as parents is central to who we are as persons, choosing the

famous individual over our mother would be tantamount to denying the moral validity of that central relationship.

Moral theory, many feminist moral philosophers maintain, must concern itself much more directly with the details of everyday moral experience and abandon its refuge in its illusory universality and impartiality. As we shall see in part 3 of this chapter, the demand for universality and impartiality also has a distorting effect insofar as it takes attention away from the actual conditions of oppression under which many women live.

Transition

Thus, contemporary feminist moral philosophers, looking back on the history of ethics, see the ways in which ethical theory needs to be revised. For some, these revisions involve the development of new moral concepts. We will be examining an example of this when we look at Carol Gilligan's development of an ethic of care. For others, it involves attending much more closely to the ways in which women's moral issues have been hidden or misunderstood. Let's first look at Gilligan's work and then turn to a consideration of the new moral issues that contemporary feminist moral philosophers are examining.

NEW MORAL CONCEPTS: THE ETHICS OF CARE

Carol Gilligan's work on moral voices has had a profound impact on our understanding of both women's moral experience and moral theory. It is particularly interesting to see how her ideas developed because she did not set out to develop a feminist theory at all. Let's begin by looking briefly at the background against which Gilligan's ideas developed and then turn to a consideration of her own position on women's moral voices and the ethics of care.

The Kohlbergian Background

Kohlberg's Question

Lawrence Kohlberg's work in the psychology of moral development set the stage for discussions of moral development in the second half of the twentieth century in America. As a young man, Kohlberg was profoundly affected by World War II and its aftermath, including the events leading to the founding of the state of Israel. When Israel was still struggling for statehood, it was under a strict embargo that was intended to prevent the importation of food and medicine and armaments as well as the immigration of people. Some people defied this embargo, thereby breaking the law, in order to participate in the founding of the state of Israel. Kohlberg, deeply moved by

their actions, wondered why some people would break the written law for the sake of what they held to be a higher good, a higher law. Clearly, many of them were not doing this for their own gain; indeed, breaking the law often actually cost them money and sometimes even their freedom or their lives. How was it, Kohlberg wondered, that some people obeyed this higher law whereas others refused to deviate from the letter of the law?

The Six Stages

Kohlberg would spend his life working out an answer to this question. What he found is that people pass through *stages* of moral development, some progressing further than others, most never getting beyond the fourth of six stages. The first two stages, which Kohlberg labels *preconventional morality*, are usually seen early in childhood. Stage 1 is dominated by the desire to avoid punishment, whereas stage 2 embodies an attitude of "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." Stages 3 and 4, which comprise *conventional morality*, usually are found in adolescence and adulthood. The third stage is what Kohlberg calls "the 'good boy/nice girl' orientation" in which the principal motivation is the desire to be a good person in one's own eyes as well as in the eyes of others. Stage 4 is characterized by following the rules of duly constituted authorities—a "law and order" mentality. The final two stages, comprising the level of *postconventional morality*, are usually never reached by most of the population. Kohlberg describes stage 5 as a social contract orientation, in which individual rights are given reasoned acceptance and revised in the light of well-reasoned critical discussions. The sixth and highest stage, which only a few persons like Mother Teresa, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. have reached, is characterized by an orientation toward universal ethical principles of justice, reciprocity, equality, and respect. These principles are arrived at through reason and are freely accepted.

Characteristics of the Stages

Kohlberg sees these stages as universal, sequential, and irreversible. His initial research covered a Malaysian aboriginal village, villages in Turkey and the Yucatan, and urban populations in Mexico and the United States. He found that the boys and young men in these cultures all went through the same sequence of stages, regardless of such factors as ethnicity, religion, or class. He found, further, that one could not skip over a stage, moving, say, from stage three to stage five without going through stage four. Nor, Kohlberg claimed, could one go back a stage; movement could be only forward. Finally, we should note an ambiguity in Kohlberg's scale, one that has a significant impact on how we understand his work. On one hand, his stage theory is *descriptive* in character. That is, it simply claims to present the facts about how individuals change morally. On the other hand, his theory is also *normative* in character insofar as it claims that later stages are better than earlier ones. Indeed, this very notion of *development*—as opposed to mere *change*—suggests that later stages are preferable to earlier ones.

The Stages and Traditional Moral Theories

Obviously, Kohlberg's later stages bear striking resemblances to some traditional moral theories. Stage 5 clearly reflects social contract theories and rule utilitarianism, whereas stage 6 stresses Kantian themes of universalizability and rationality. (I suspect that Kohlberg was influenced by John Rawls, whose *Theory of Justice* circulated in manuscript form for many years before its publication in 1971; in that work, Rawls notes some of his differences with Kohlberg.) Clearly, the more impartial and the more universal one's moral reasoning is, the better it is for Kohlberg.

Gilligan's Starting Point

When Carol Gilligan began her research into moral development, she had no particular interest in gender issues. She was, however, interested in Kohlberg's work, and in the early seventies she began to study the moral reasoning of draft resisters. What attracted her to this study was that it presented precisely the same problem that Kohlberg had originally grappled with: How is it that some people come to obey a higher law than the written law of the land? Then something happened to Gilligan's study that social scientists have nightmares about. President Nixon canceled the draft. Although this change was politically welcome, it obviously undermined Gilligan's research project because there was no longer any draft to resist! Fortunately, she was still at an early stage of her research, and she shifted to study another difficult moral choice in our society: abortion.

Now, the interesting thing about this story is that Gilligan did not set out to study women's moral voices; indeed, if the draft had not been canceled, her subject pool—just like Kohlberg's—would have been composed entirely of men. (It is an interesting sign of the times that twenty-five years ago research could be confined solely to males and virtually no one would object—or even notice.) It was initially only a quirk of political fate that directed her attention toward an exclusively female group of subjects for her research. Yet it was Gilligan's sensitivity to what she then heard from her subjects that led to her tremendously influential work. When she began her research with women who faced the decision about abortion, she realized that what she was hearing did not fit into the framework that Kohlberg had established. We began to realize that women speak about their moral lives in a distinctive voice, one that Kohlberg's theory is unable to appreciate.

Women's Moral Voices

The Metaphor of Voice

In 1982, Carol Gilligan published a collection of her articles as a book entitled *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development.* Its impact has been profound, not just in Gilligan's own field of developmental psychology, but also in a wide variety of other areas. Philosophy, religious

studies, clinical psychology, communication studies, history, political science, literature, and art criticism are but a few of the traditional disciplines influenced by her work. The metaphor of "voice" became a particularly powerful one, and women in a number of fields concentrated on the challenge of "finding their own voice" in their specific fields.

The metaphor of voice struck a chord, as it were, with many women, and it is worth pausing for a moment to consider its power. By talking about women's voices instead of their theories or perspectives, Gilligan chose a focus that is more concrete and potentially more capable of integrating differences harmoniously than are other, more common metaphors for moral diversity. Throughout this book, we have seen how the language of theories leads quickly to competitive and combative accounts of morality in which ultimately only one theory can be correct. Appealing to perspectives instead of theories offers more room for diversity, but there is virtually no trace of individuality in the perspectives themselves. To speak of voices, however, is immediately to conjure up something concrete, something with tone, texture, and cadence. Think, for example, of the distinctive voice of a singer like Whitney Houston, of a politician like Barbara Jordan or Margaret Thatcher, of a poet like Maya Angelou, or of actresses like Meryl Streep, Dolly Parton, and Whoopi Goldberg. Their voices are rich, nuanced, evocative, and utterly distinctive. The finely textured specificity found in the appeal to voices is not found in talk about theories or perspectives.

Three other characteristics of voices are particularly noteworthy. First, voices combine both emotion and content. *How* something is said is closely tied to *what* is said. Voices are *embodied* in a way that theories are not. Second, voices are described and assessed in a wide range of terms, most of which have little to do with "true" and "false" or "right" and "wrong." Voices may be strong or weak, full-bodied or hollow, lilting or deep, strident or sweet, excited or dull, trembling and hesitant, or clear and confident. Third, voices may be different without excluding one another. Think of the ways in which people sing together. They may blend their voices in a choir. They may sing harmony, one voice in distinctive counterpoint to another. They may toss a melody back and forth from one person to another, taking turns singing. One may be the lead singer, others may sing background. There are, in other words, numerous ways in which voices may interact with one another.

Think about this in regard to yourself. If you were asked to describe your moral *theory*, it would probably be in impersonal language that gives little clue to who you are as an individual. On the other hand, if you were asked to describe your moral *voice*, it would be much more specific, much more indicative of who you are as a person, much more recognizable to your friends as *you*. It might be quiet or loud, questioning or obedient, strident or cajoling, authoritative or confused, stiff or supple, humorous or serious, fearful or reckless. Although we can certainly describe different types of voices, even the types have a concreteness and specificity about them that theories lack.

In her novels, poetry, and essays, Alice Walker (1944–) gives voice to the experiences of African-American women.

Let's now hear what Gilligan found out about women's moral voices. We will begin by contrasting women's voices to men's voices and then look more specifically at the voices that characterize the stages of women's moral development.

Differences between Men's Voices and Women's Voices

When Gilligan began doing her research with female subjects, she noticed that their responses didn't seem to fit neatly into Kohlberg's framework. It's not that the responses couldn't be squeezed into that framework, but rather that something essential and distinctive was lost in the process and other things were misinterpreted or misvalued. Gilligan's study showed, first of all, that women tended much more often than the men of Kohlberg's studies to see the moral life in terms of *care* rather than *justice*, in terms of *responsibility* rather than *rights*. Whereas men see problems as moral issues when they

involve competing claims about *rights*, women see problems as moral issues when they involve the *suffering* of other people. Whereas men see the primary moral imperative as centering on *treating everyone fairly*, women see that moral imperative as centering on *caring* about others and about themselves. Men typically make moral decisions by *applying rules fairly and impartially*, whereas women are more likely to seek resolutions that *preserve emotional connectedness* for everyone. Similarly, men tend to look back and to judge whether a moral decision was correct or not by asking whether the rules were properly applied, whereas women tend to ask whether relationships were preserved and whether people were hurt. The quality of the relationships, rather than the impartiality of the decisions, is the standard for evaluating decisions for women. The meaning of responsibility also changes. For men, responsibility is primarily a matter of being *answerable* for actions, for having followed (or failed to follow) the relevant rules. For women, responsibility is primarily a matter of taking care of the other person, including (and sometimes especially emphasizing) that person's feelings. Moreover, it is directed toward what the other person actually feels and suffers, not what "anyone" (i.e., an abstract moral agent) would experience. Responsibility is directed toward real individuals, not toward abstract codes of conduct.

These differences tend to reflect deeper differences between men and women, differences in the ways in which they conceive of the self. Men are much more likely to see the self in terms of autonomy, freedom, independence, separateness, and hierarchy. Rules guide the interactions among people, and roles establish each individual's place in the hierarchy. In contrast, women tend to see the self in terms of relatedness, interdependence, emotional connectedness, and responsiveness to the needs of others. Instead of depending on rules as men do, women are much more likely to show an immediate response to the plight of the other person. They experience themselves, first and foremost, as *connected;* the self is its network of relationships.

These differences also affect what men and women will tend to experience as comfortable or threatening. Typically, men will experience the top of a social or professional hierarchy as appealing, as attractive to their sense of autonomy, as compatible with their sense of separateness. Women are more likely to experience it as isolated and detached, as threatening to their sense of connectedness. Conversely, men are more likely to feel at risk in situations that threaten their sense of autonomy and separateness—especially in situations of dependency and intimacy. Women are more likely to feel at risk in situations that threaten their sense of responsiveness and connectedness—and these are typically situations of independence and hierarchy.

The Stages of Women's Moral Development

Gilligan sees women as developing through stages of moral growth, just as men do, but the stages are different in important respects. She divides her schema into three levels, just as Kohlberg did. However, instead of having two stages under each level, Gilligan has three full stages and a transitional

period between each stage. Thus, there are three full stages and two transitional stages.

Moral development for females begins, according to Gilligan, with the concern for *individual survival* as paramount. This is level 1 of moral development, corresponding to Kohlberg's preconventional level. It is followed by the *transition from selfishness to responsibility*, in which women start to become aware of morality as requiring that they be responsible for the well-being of others. Level 2, which corresponds to Kohlberg's level of conventional morality, is one in which *goodness comes to be equated with self-sacrifice*. Many of us have probably had mothers or grandmothers who saw their lives in precisely these terms: To be a good person is to take care of other people (husband, children, family) at the expense of herself. For them, it wasn't a struggle to motivate themselves to take care of other people—the struggle came when they tried to give themselves permission to take care of *themselves*. It is precisely this struggle to include the self that constitutes the second transitional stage. It is often a difficult struggle because initially it feels more like moral regression than moral progress because morality is equated with self-sacrifice. Gradually, however, this experience gives way to a third level, one in which moral goodness is seen as *caring for both self and others*. This highest level is one that takes inclusiveness and nonviolence as ideals and that condemns exploitation and hurt.

The Voice of Care

A clear theme emerges throughout these stages: Women's moral voices are voices of care. Whether it be a narrowly defined care for one's own survival, an altruistic care for other people, or an inclusive care for both self and others, *morality is primarily about caring*. It is not about rules, universalizability, the impartial computation of consequences, or anything like that. It is about a direct relationship of emotional responsiveness to the suffering of persons, both self and other.

Gilligan's Traditionalism

One of the striking things about Gilligan's work, especially in light of its strong impact on feminist thinking, is the traditional, almost stereotypical picture of women that it seems to promote. Women emerge as more concerned about relationships, emotional connectedness, and care-giving than are men, who seem more independent, rule-oriented, and emotionally detached. Gilligan herself states that her findings are only generalizations and that it is certainly possible that some individuals do not fit into the pattern that she associates with their biological sex. It seems that the danger here is that this moral theory may perpetuate traditional sex-based stereotypes. Yet I think there is a way of retaining many of Gilligan's insights about *masculinity* and *femininity* without necessarily tying those as closely to *males* and *females* as she does. Let's look at the issues raised by this gender-based morality.

Integrating Diverse Voices

A deep ambiguity runs through Gilligan's work. Clearly, her work is *descriptive*. It articulates women's moral voices and the differences between their voices and men's without necessarily making any value judgments about which are better. However, at times her work also seems to have *normative* implications, suggesting that one voice may be as good as, perhaps even better than, another. Some of Gilligan's statements suggest that she thinks both men's voices and women's voices are of equal value in morality; other statements suggest that she may see women's voices as superior. In this context, we can set aside the question of what Gilligan herself says about this question and look at the various possible positions on this issue and consider them on their own merits.

The Separate but Equal Thesis

Assuming that, in general, men and women have different moral voices, one of the ways in which we could deal with the differences is to keep the two separate but equal. Men and women have different moral voices. Men's voices are right for men, women's voices right for women. Neither is superior to the other; they are just different.

The problem with this thesis is fourfold. First, it is very difficult to retain the "but equal" part of such a position. After the two voices have been separated, it is all too easy to dismiss the second voice as less important. Second, such a position tends to perpetuate gender-based stereotyping because only males are given male voices and only females are given female voices. Third, it suggests that men and women have nothing to learn from one another because each sex has its own moral voice. Fourth, males who have a "female voice" and females who have a "male voice" are looked down upon. The separate but equal approach is, as it were, a form of sex-based isolationism.

The Superiority Thesis

The second possible position is to maintain that one of these two voices is superior to the other. Historically, this has been the dominant position, most often with men maintaining (usually implicitly, occasionally explicitly) that men's voices are superior to women's voices in morality. In recent times, the roles have sometimes been reversed, with women claiming the superiority of women's voices.

There are two problems with this position. First, to say that one voice is completely true for everyone in all situations is interesting but obviously false. To say that one voice is partially true for some people in some situations is accurate, but it is so vague as to be unhelpful without further elaboration of the particular conditions under which one voice takes precedence over the other. Such further elaboration then yields a position that is significantly different than the original thesis.

The second problem with this position is that it is exclusionary. It excludes whichever position is seen as not true—and that usually means that we cannot learn from that other, excluded voice. If, on the other hand, we admit that we can learn from the other voice, then we find ourselves defending a version of one of the next two positions.

The Integrationist Thesis

The integrationist maintains that there is ultimately *only one moral voice*, a voice that may be the integration of many different voices. The integrationist need not claim to know precisely what this voice is but must be committed to the claim that ultimately there is only one voice.

The principal difficulty with the integrationist thesis is that it is susceptible to losing the richness that comes from diversity. The integrationist position tends to be assimilationist, blurring the distinctive identities of the sources of its components. It celebrates a moral androgyny as a replacement for the sex-based voices.

The Diversity Thesis

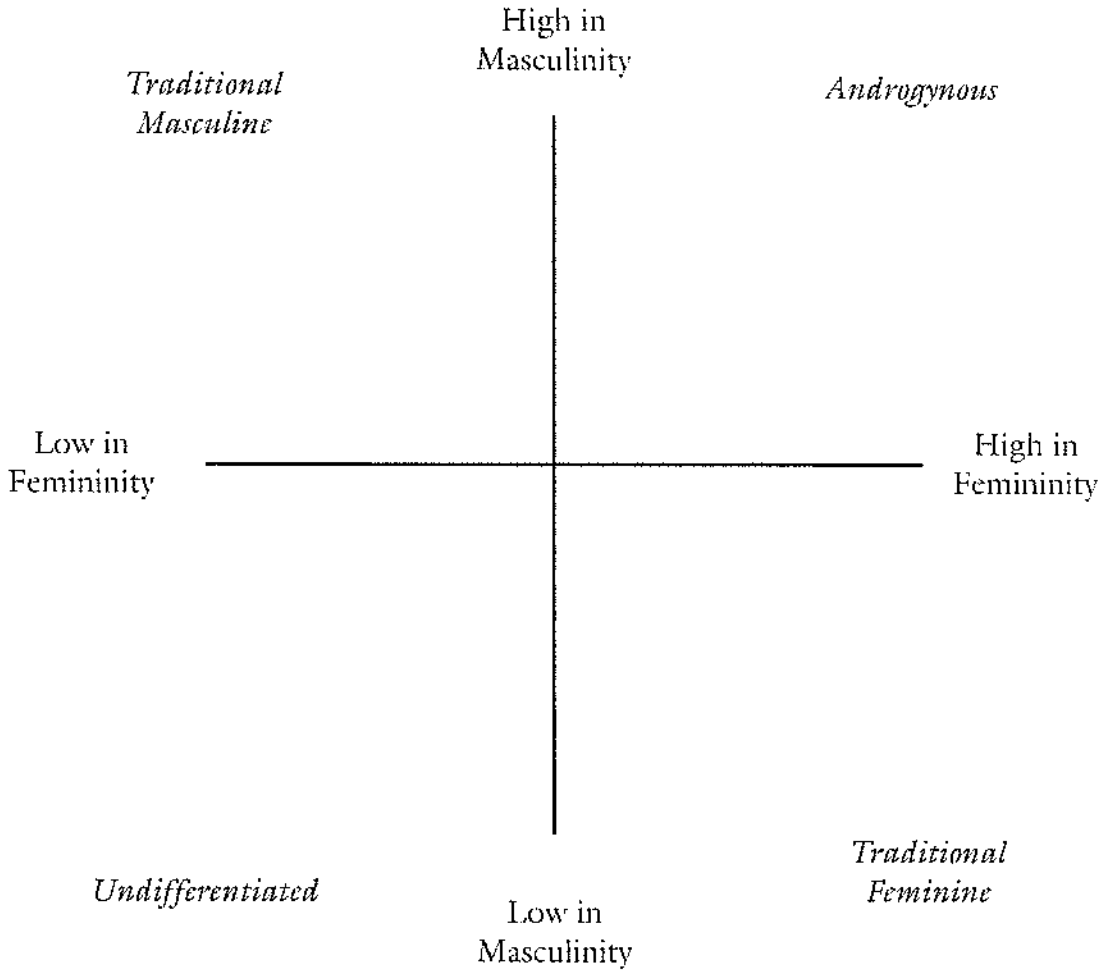
The final thesis claims that we have diverse moral voices and that this diversity is a principal source of richness and growth in the moral life. We can learn from one another's differences as well as from similarities. The diversity thesis in the area of gender most closely embodies the pluralistic approach characteristic of this book.

The diversity thesis has two complementary sides. First, there is the *external diversity thesis*, which suggests that different individuals have different (gender-based) moral voices and that here is a fruitful difference from which we can learn. Men can learn from women, just as women can learn from men. What makes this an *external* diversity thesis is that it sees diversity as something that exists among separate individuals.

The *internal diversity thesis* sees diversity as also existing *within* each individual. Each of us, in other words, has both masculine and feminine moral voices within us, and this diversity of internal voices is considered a positive thing. One of the attractions of this position is that it minimizes gender stereotyping because it denies that only men can have a masculine dimension or that only women can have a feminine dimension. Men can have both masculine and feminine dimensions to their moral voices, just as women can have both.

Nor is it necessary to think that an increase in one type of voice necessarily leads to a decrease in another. Sandra Bem has suggested that masculine and feminine traits in general may be mapped along two different axes, such that an individual may be high in both (androgynous), low in both (undifferentiated), high in femininity but low in masculinity (traditional feminine), or high in masculinity but low in femininity (traditional masculine). This leads to the following schema.

The Bem Scale



The principal strength of this scale is that it does not make masculinity and femininity mutually exclusive traits. This is in sharp contrast to models that plot masculinity and femininity on a single axis with "strongly feminine" and "strongly masculine" at the opposing ends of the axis. On Bem's scale, one can be high in both, or low in both, as well as high in just one or the other. More often than not, males identify with a masculine gender and females with a feminine gender. We are probably most familiar with individuals who are high on only one of these scales, but we have occasional examples of individuals who are high on both scales.

Gilligan's Recent Work: Rethinking the Foundations of Ethics

In recent years, Gilligan has continued to pursue a series of empirical investigations, concentrating increasingly on the development of adolescent girls, including their moral development. As this work has progressed, several themes have moved from the background of her work increasingly into the foreground.

Ethics as Conversation

Moral discourse, to Gilligan's ear, is primarily *conversation*. This reflects her earlier criticisms of Kohlberg and the methodological shift that characterizes her work. Kohlberg began by presenting his subjects with the now well-known Heinz dilemma. Heinz's wife is critically ill with a rare form of cancer. The only druggist who has a possible cure is charging an outrageous amount of money, which Heinz just doesn't have. The question that Kohlberg poses is: Should Heinz steal the drug? Why or why not? Kohlberg expected an answer and a reason (e.g., human life is more valuable than property), but not a conversation. Indeed, one of the disturbing things (from the Kohlbergian standpoint) was that girls wanted to talk about the situation. They asked questions, looked for more details, tried to find hidden alternatives, and so forth. As a result, their responses often didn't fit the framework established by Kohlberg. These girls were, in effect, offering a different view of moral discourse. Kohlberg's view was that moral discourse is about taking a position and giving reasons in support of it. Gilligan's respondents were telling her that ethical discourse has a different form: It is primarily a conversation, an interchange.

Inclusive Conversations

After moral discourse comes to be seen as a conversation—a venerable tradition, to be sure, stretching from Plato's dialogues to Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1975)—it is a short step to seeing that the conversation must be an inclusive one. In Gilligan's recent thinking, she increasingly emphasizes the idea that the conversation must be opened up to include everyone. Voices that had previously been excluded or muffled—notably the voices of women and many people of color in the United States—must become equal participants in the discussion. Again, recall the Heinz example: The voice of the wife is completely absent. Certainly one very appropriate response, which has little place on the Kohlbergian scale, is that Heinz should ask his wife what she wants him to do. Indeed, we hear nothing of the druggist's voice, either.

New Voices, New Issues

Gilligan thus begins to rethink the foundations of ethics by seeing ethics primarily as conversation rather than as theories and arguments and by suggesting that more inclusive conversations are better than ones that exclude some people's voices. The third step in this rethinking is to see the way in which, with the introduction of new moral voices, new moral issues come to the fore. Think, for example, of issues such as domestic violence, child abuse, family leave, and responsibilities toward elderly parents. These are pervasive moral issues, hardly ones confronted by only a few isolated individuals, yet they have received scant attention in the standard philosophical anthologies on contemporary moral issues.

The Use and Abuse of Moral Notions

Finally, Gilligan's recent work offers us a cautionary note: Beware of the ways in which so-called morality can be used to justify violence. Wars are an obvious example: All too often, countless people are killed in the name of honor. Domestic violence is often seen as justified in the eyes of the abusers to maintain their honor, and the appeal to moral values is often used to justify the suppression of those who do not agree with our version of morality.

Caring and Act Utilitarianism

Interestingly, there are some similarities between an ethics of caring and act utilitarianism. They are both, generally speaking, consequentialist theories; that is, both see morality primarily as a matter of consequences. Both are concerned with weighing the consequences of projected actions, and both see those consequences—broadly speaking—in terms of the pleasure or pain that they might cause.

But the differences are equally instructive. The act utilitarian usually employs some kind of calculus, some method of computing the total amount of pleasure and pain that would result from various courses of action. Gilligan's ethics of caring is consequentialist, but it differs from act utilitarianism both in (1) what kinds of consequences count and (2) how they are measured. The care ethic focuses primarily on two kinds of consequences: (1) the extent to which people might be *hurt* by a particular decision and (2) the degree to which a particular decision might diminish the *sense of connectedness* among the participants in the situation. Connectedness itself becomes a moral value. Moreover, the method by which these consequences are determined has a strongly intersubjective component. Whereas utilitarian calculators might well attempt to weigh consequences in the isolation of their offices, the caring person attempts to weigh consequences by talking with the participants and allowing them to participate actively in the process. For those assuming the standpoint of an ethic of care, there is an essentially intersubjective moment to the decision-making process. Both *what* is valued and *how* it is valued have a strong intersubjective dimension.

Emotions play a much more significant role in the ethics of caring than they do in the utilitarian calculus. First, in an ethics of caring, emotions (especially compassion and empathy) are necessary in order to know how much pleasure or pain a particular action causes. How can you know how much pain a particular action may inflict on friends if you do not listen to what they say about their feelings and try to understand those feelings? This process of listening and understanding is not just a purely intellectual one, but also involves an emotional, or affective, component.

Second, there is another emotive dimension to the ethics of caring that is absent from act utilitarianism. Caring simply has an irremediably emotive component to it. To care about someone is not just to act in particular ways; it is also, and necessarily, to *feel* in particular ways. There would be some-

thing odd if a parent tried to add up impersonally all the hedons and dolors for a particular choice that will affect the family. Part of caring is to feel something for the other person. (There is also a double evaluation going on: understanding how much the other person values a particular action of ours, and understanding how much we value the other person.)

This suggests a way of understanding the relationship between act utilitarianism and the ethics of caring. In an impersonal context where we are dealing with large numbers of people who are strangers to us, act utilitarian considerations may well be relevant. In personal contexts where we are dealing with people we know and care about, the ethics of caring may well better capture the moral insights that utilitarianism captures in the other, larger-scale contexts.

Feminist Moral Theory: Emerging Moral Issues

Feminine and Feminist Ethics

Moral theorists often distinguish between feminine ethics and feminist ethics. In general, *feminine ethics* is seen as emphasizing what is characteristic of women's moral voices. Often, following Gilligan, this is developed into an ethic of care. *Feminist ethics,* on the other hand, begins more directly with an awareness of women's oppression and argues more directly for policies that would rectify past injustices and establish genuine equality. In an influential treatment of feminist ethics, Alison Jaggar has argued that there are four minimum conditions that an ethical theory must meet to count as a feminist theory:

1. It must be sensitive to gender inequalities, never beginning with the assumption that men and women are similarly situated.
2. It must understand individual actions within the larger context of broader social practices.
3. It must be able to provide guidance to issues that traditionally have been seen as within the private domain, such as personal relationships and family issues.
4. It must "take the moral experience of all women seriously, though not, of course, uncritically."

In this account, feminist ethics is always aware of the ways in which issues of gender involve issues of power as well and the ways in which seemingly isolated issues exist within a larger social context of gender inequalities.

This is certainly a controversial distinction, and not everyone would agree with how the line of demarcation is drawn. In her article in *Hypatia* (1995) that was part of the Symposium on Care and Justice, Carol Gilligan distinguished between a feminine ethic of care and a feminist ethic of care. A

feminine ethic of care urges women to pursue traditional virtues of selflessness, subservience, humility, and self-sacrifice, and Gilligan clearly distances herself from this position. A *feminist ethic of care*, in contrast, maintains the importance of relationships but refuses to cooperate with any efforts to confine women within traditional patriarchal power relationships.

However this distinction is drawn, the fact remains that some feminist moral theorists have been much more radical in their critique of the gender bias of traditional ethics, and they have often seen these issues in starker political terms than we have used so far. As philosophers take the moral experiences of women seriously, they begin to see that there are a number of previously neglected moral issues that merit attention. In many cases, these can be understood through the application of traditional moral concepts in new contexts. Here are just a few examples.

The Distinction between Public and Private

One of the crucial distinctions in traditional moral theory is between the public and private realms. Whereas moral scrutiny was focused on interactions in the public realm, the private realm was rarely seen as a suitable object of moral investigation. The private realm corresponded in traditional societies with the realm of women and children, and the net effect of this distinction was to place women and children beyond the protection of the moral umbrella. Moral issues such as the division of childrearing responsibilities between mothers and fathers received scant attention. Similarly, there was little moral consideration of topics such as incest, child abuse, or domestic violence. These issues are by no means confined to women, but they tend to be issues that are experienced more directly by the relatively powerless and disenfranchised in our society: children, women, persons of color, and persons with disabilities.

Justice and Family Issues

After this distinction between the public and the private is called into question, new areas of moral concern come into view. Family issues now merit more direct moral concern. Traditional moral philosophy is notable for the ways in which it has simply ignored the moral issues that arise within the family, despite the fact that these are pervasive and serious. Susan Moller Okin, for example, has raised a number of questions in her *Justice, Gender and the Family* (1991) about the necessity for justice within the family. What, Okin asks, would count as a just distribution of responsibilities within the family in regard to raising children? She suggests a Rawlsian experiment, asking us what policies about marriage and family we would agree to if we did not know in advance whether our particular role in society would be male or female. The ways in which responsibilities and rewards are apportioned would be significantly different, and we would be much more likely to have equity between men and women.

The radical character of feminist ethics begins to emerge in works such as Okin's. After the voices of women (and others who have been excluded from the moral conversation) are heard and taken seriously, a number of things in society need to be reordered. Traditional moral theory—at least when viewed in retrospect—seems to have provided an endorsement of the status quo in many instances, yet this endorsement has been maintained only through selective blindness. Okin's work does not introduce fundamentally new moral ideas; instead, she applies accepted ideas to situations that had previously been ignored. Thus she takes the idea of justice *within* the family seriously, and the result is a reordering of our moral understanding of that domain and of its place within the larger society.

After the idea of justice is taken seriously in these contexts, we are quickly compelled to restructure some traditional moral notions. Take, for example, the notion of justice as equal treatment. On its surface, this notion of equality seems simple enough: People are treated equally when they are treated the same. What does it mean for women to have equal opportunity in the workplace? Treating people the same becomes more suspect when we begin to realize that in general men and women are not in the same initial position in society in regardto jobs. Typically, when evaluating job candidates, employers will look at employment histories. All other things being equal, candidates who show a steady employment history (and perhaps steady movement up the employment ladder) will be preferred to those who have spotty employment records or who have advanced less at the same age. Yet in our society men and women face different family pressures and expectations in this area. Women are more likely to be encouraged to postpone career advances for the sake of the family. Those women who choose to pursue both career and family simultaneously often experience much more conflicting pressures than do their male counterparts.

Background gender differences often undermine seemingly gender-neutral criteria. For example, imagine a couple who decides that decisions about relocating for employment offers will be made in a gender-neutral fashion. They say, "We'll go wherever the highest paying job offer is, whether it be for the man or the woman." This appears to be completely gender neutral. Closer inspection, however, yields a more complex picture. Overall, women are still paid less for comparable positions than their male counterparts, although this has improved over the years. Moreover, in married couples, husbands are usually three or four years older than their wives on average—and thus further advanced in their career paths. These are two of the factors that make it more likely that, even with such an apparently gender-neutral criterion such as "highest paying job," couples are more likely to follow the husband's career path than the wife's. Of course, if this is done once, it then puts the wife at a further disadvantage.

Examples such as the preceding one illustrate two points about feminist ethics. First, they show that ethical reflection must pay attention to background conditions that may affect seemingly neutral moral rules and practices. Second, and more generally, they illustrate the way in which ethical

theory for many feminists is much more concrete than it is for many traditional moral theorists.

Violence and Powerlessness

Feminist moral theorists show an awareness of the experiences of women, experiences that have often either escaped the notice of their male counterparts or been misinterpreted by them. Consider the example of violence against women. Whereas traditionally this issue received virtually no attention at all, in recent years feminist ethical theorists—male as well as female—have focused a critical eye on the ways in which women (and others in positions of relative powerlessness) have been objects of violence. Rape and domestic violence are two of the principal ways in which this occurs.

Revealing the Problem

There are several dimensions to feminist moral considerations of violence. The first of these is simply the effort to make the problem visible. In traditional moral theories, the tacit assumption is that moral problems, if they need to be solved, will present themselves as demanding attention. Yet this assumes that those who are suffering are able to voice their concerns loudly enough to attract attention. However, this is often not the case in either domestic violence or in rape. In situations of domestic violence, women are often afraid to press charges for fear of reprisals. Moreover, they often hope that the relationship can be salvaged and see an appeal to their rights as reducing the chances of salvaging the relationship. In the past (and to some extent still today) women also feared an indifferent or even hostile reception at the hands of police and prosecutors. Rape presents comparable considerations. It is one of the few offenses in which the victim is often subject to much greater scrutiny than is the perpetrator. This is particularly the case in areas of date rape and spousal rape, where the protection of the law is less clear cut and the criticism of the victim all the greater. Thus, feminist ethical theory, through its consideration of issues such as violence and rape, tells us something very important about the nature of moral problems. Some problems, it demonstrates, hide themselves from view, and the first moral task is simply to bring them out into the open.

Understanding the Problem

The second dimension is the attempt to understand the nature of violence better. Although there is certainly much to be said for emphasizing the physical dimensions of violence, the story hardly ends there. Violence has a psychological dimension, and indeed the significance of physical violence may often be found in the psychological dimension. Consider an act such as knocking a person over. It may be quite different, even though the physical dimensions are the same, if the act (1) takes place in a football game, (2) is intended to thwart a robber from fleeing, or (3) is the act of a husband abusing

his wife. Indeed, when one sees the world primarily in terms of relationships, it makes sense that the core of violence will consist in the destruction of relationships. This is a good example of the way in which feminist ethical theory prompts us to reconsider the nature of some common moral problems.

Dominance and Patriarchy

A central theme emerges from these considerations: power and powerlessness. It is easy to see the way in which feminist moral theory leads quickly into a critique of power structures that dominate specific groups, especially women. (These groups need not be composed of just women—think of same-sex rape of men in prison, another case of powerlessness that is largely ignored in our society.) Feminist moral theory, situated in a society such as ours, inevitably leads to a critique of the structures that historically have dominated women. These structures are usually grouped under the general heading of "patriarchy."

Seeking Solutions

The final step in all of this for feminist ethical theorists is the development of ways of improving the situation. This has often been the most difficult step insofar as most remedies bring significant liabilities with them. The goal is to establish a society in which groups of individuals are not dominated by power relationships that diminish them. Legislation certainly provides an important component of the answer here. Laws prohibiting violence toward women (and others who are relatively powerless) play an important role here, and such laws need to exist within a justice system that is supportive of the larger ends of equality to which feminism is committed.

Rights to Self-Determination

Are Rights the Right Perspective?

There has been a tension within feminist ethics about the importance of the concept of rights and its proper role in the moral life. As we saw in our discussion of Carol Gilligan's work, some feminists have argued that the concept of rights has its natural home in a patriarchal framework; rights, at least, belong to the domain of the impersonal and anonymous world. However, many feminist moral philosophers have recognized that the concept of rights has played a pivotal role in the improvement of the conditions of women throughout the world. Without the leverage provided by the concept of rights, it would be much more difficult to bring about change in the oppressive conditions that women experience.

Reproductive Freedom

One of the areas in which the question of rights becomes important is that of reproductive freedom. Feminist moral theorists have been deeply concerned

with freeing women from those structures that have in the past dominated them and restricted their freedom. One of the central ways in which that freedom has been restricted or denied is in the domain of reproductive choices, and much of the defense of abortion rights arises precisely out of the affirmation of women's right to be free from oppression. No one, feminist moral theorists argue, should be forced to bear a child against her will. A discussion of the morality of abortion would take us far beyond the scope of this work about moral theory, and no attempt will be made here to decide this difficult question once and for all. What is important in this context, however, is to see the way in which the question of abortion rights for feminist moral philosophers fits into a larger picture of freeing women from coercion. It is this moral concern that many feminist philosophers find overriding.

Considerations of power and the elimination of domination are by no means confined to this single issue. Let's look at several such issues that fall under the category of sexism, sexual harassment, and pornography—structures of domination that distort our moral experience.

Sexism, Sexual Harassment, and Pornography

The experience of discrimination is something that almost by definition escapes the notice of those who control the power in society. Until the voices of those being discriminated against are heard, discrimination appears on the surface to be a minor issue at best. However, after we begin to hear the voices of the oppressed, a very different picture emerges.

Sexism

Feminist moral philosophers see the pervasiveness of *sexism*, an attitude that tends to stereotype women and to devalue their moral experience. Sexist attitudes portray women as less capable than men, and these attitudes then serve as the basis for decisions and actions that disadvantage women. For example, sexist perceptions in hiring new employees and promoting current ones may well result in women's careers being hindered. Sometimes such discrimination is blatant, at other times much more subtle and difficult to discern and correct.

Language

Language provides interesting examples of some of the ways in which sexism is embedded into our culture. Think of the ways in which the same behavior might be portrayed in positive terms for men—"assertive"—and negative terms for women—"aggressive." Our prejudices are built into our language. To call a boy a "sissy" or a "girl" is strong criticism, whereas calling a girl a "Tomboy" is much less serious. Take another example. Think of English slang verbs for sexual intercourse. As several philosophers have pointed out, such verbs generally call for a male as the subject of the sen-

tence and a female as the object; furthermore, most of these verbs are also synonymous with the verb *to hurt*. This suggests a disturbing picture of sexual intercourse as a hurtful activity that men inflict onto women.

Sexual Harassment

Sexism involves seeing and treating women differently simply because they are women. *Sexual harassment* is different because it seeks in most cases to extract sexual "favors" from the person (usually a woman) being harassed and uses threats as the basis for forcing compliance. In some instances, the threats are direct; in other instances, given the power differential between a boss and an employee, they may be unspoken but nevertheless quite powerful. The greater the power differential, the greater the possibility for abuse.

When women are sexually harassed, they are often silent for several reasons. They may feel shamed, even though they did nothing to elicit the harassment. Second, they may doubt whether their allegations will be believed or seen as important. (Think about the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings and Anita Hill in this regard.) Third, they may feel, sometimes quite rightly, that speaking out will call forth recriminations. Once again, feminist moral theory is concerned with bringing the problem to light—and then looking for ways of alleviating the problem.

After those who have been sexually harassed are assured that they can come forth without recriminations, it is often astounding to see the breadth and depth of sexual harassment. Scandals in the U.S. armed forces in recent years illustrate the conspiracy of silence that has concealed these issues for so long.

Pornography

Feminist moral theory aims not only to uncover problems, but also to develop ways of responding to them. Nowhere has the search for remedies been so divisive as in regard to pornography. There is little question that pornography reinforces sexist attitudes and encourages sexual harassment. However, feminist philosophers are often deeply committed to the principle of free speech, and the debate centers on the question of whether pornography deserves protection as free speech. Although most feminists are in agreement that pornography is offensive, they are divided about how to respond to this. Some, such as Catharine MacKinnon, have argued that pornography is a type of action and thus not shielded by freedom of speech laws. Others have argued that, no matter how distasteful pornography is, it is best seen as free speech and thus should not be suppressed.

The Feminization of Poverty

One of the characteristics of feminist ethical theory is that it does not begin with the assumption that men and women are similarly situated in society. It may arrive at this as a conclusion in some cases, but it does not start out with

it as a premise. This is most clear in the area of poverty, which is increasingly a condition that women are more likely to encounter than are men.

How, feminist ethical theorists ask, can men and women be treated equally in financial terms? Certainly equal pay for equal work, but the matter goes beyond this. Should there be equal pay for comparable work, especially because some areas of work that are traditionally reserved for women are paid much less than the corresponding areas for men? And, if the answer to this question is an affirmative one, how should this be accomplished? Should the government act in ways that would bring this about, or is it best seen as a matter of private initiative?

Pensions

Consider just one example of the type of inequalities that feminist theorists consider. How are pensions to be apportioned for married couples who are getting divorced? If one spouse stayed at home and raised the children while the other worked for money outside the home, do both have an equal claim to the outside pension? If not, are women (usually the ones who raise the children) going to find themselves as a group economically disadvantaged during their retirement years? What is fair in a situation such as this? This type of issue takes us to the very heart of our conception of such fundamental moral notions as fairness and justice.

Global Poverty

When we consider the issue of women's poverty on a global level, the picture is much more distressing than the situation in the United States alone. Here an interesting tension develops, which we shall examine in more detail in the next chapter: The demands of multiculturalism often seem to encourage a nonjudgmental attitude toward practices in other cultures that appear to be quite harmful to women.

Environmental Concern and Ecofeminism

When women's moral voices become part of the ethical conversation, the boundaries of the moral domain begin to expand as well. One of the most influential movements in contemporary feminist moral theory has been the extension of feminist concerns to the environment.

There is a natural movement here from feminine and feminist ethics, especially the ethics of care, to environmental concerns. Although by no means antitechnology, the ethics of care is certainly mistrustful of "technological fixes" that seek to resolve problems through the brute application of technology to the environment. Indeed, it is likely to see technology as part of a patriarchal structure of domination. Feminists seek to explore relationships with the natural world that do not involve domination and mastery, but rather harmony and balance and peace.

Ecofeminist philosophers see a deep connection between the ways in which women and nature have been understood and treated in the West.

Karen J. Warren, one of the leading proponents of ecofeminism, has pointed out the ways in which both women and nature have been subjected to oppression. We often use terms relating to animals to describe women, usually in unfavorable ways, and we tend to talk about nature in feminine terms. Ecofeminist philosophers see feminism and environmentalism as mutually entailing each other: one is not complete without the other. We cannot end the domination of nature without simultaneously overcoming the domination of women, and vice versa. Consider the traditional (male) attitude toward mountain climbing, in which the climbers are seeking to "conquer" the mountain. Climbing for them is a relationship of domination. The ecofeminist climber, on the other hand, sees climbing as a way of coming to know the mountain and also as a process of self-knowledge, and in both dimensions "knowing" is as much a matter of feeling as of concepts.

Conclusion

We all live in the same world. The moral challenge facing us is to decide how to do this in a way that promotes respect, understanding, and community. Taking women's moral voices seriously, as we have seen in this chapter, involves reassessing traditional moral theory, expanding our stock of fundamental moral concepts, and recognizing the existence of a wide range of previously unacknowledged moral issues. In doing these things, feminist moral theory opens up the possibility of a richer, more diverse moral conversation.